# Metalsmith

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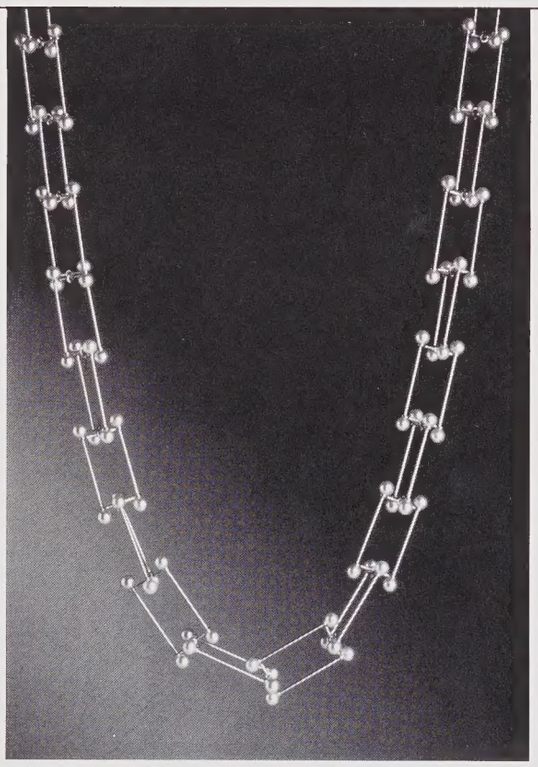

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## Editorial

A number of readers I have come into contact with have said they don't want to read any negative criticism in *Metalsmith*. They ask "What would people outside the field think if all we talked about was the bad work?" "Why shouldn't we promote our field and be a cheerleader?" My first response is to be shocked at these people's resistance to the idea that criticism is not only promotion, but that it is also a process of growth, education, and personal and aesthetic development. Do we really believe that we should not be held responsible for our actions and decisions? I wonder if those who feel that way think that critiques in art school or workshops are simply punishments to be endured. Education is more than a demo of a technique and then a long concentrated period of labor to achieve perfection in that technique. And I believe that a part of the mission of *Metalsmith* is continuing education.

I am always amazed when I realize that many people don't want to be challenged and called to show responsibility for what they are making. Are these same people equally willing to disavow responsibility for their work when a patron or critic responds favorably? Considering this apparent desire to overlook the contributions of processes, forms, materials, history, myth, and even the effects of the marketplace, why do metalsmiths believe their contributions to society should be above critique and evaluation? In our private lives we may well choose to hide our discomforts, but that is a private arena. However, *Metalsmith* and the work that it covers are very much in the public arena. We need, as our government has recently shown, a new way to label the contents of our products and an often sensitive, sometimes negative criticism is one of the few ways to do that.

History, habit, materials, and even certain imagery are usually more powerful than any individual maker or work. Artists have an obligation to either be aware of the resonances of their choices or to, at least, not complain when the audience and/or the critic acknowledges and wants to discuss those resonances. Most of us would admit that it is probably impossible to include a swastika in a work without recalling nazism and the holocaust, despite the fact that the swastika has been used throughout the ages by Western, Eastern, and tribal cultures. Something of the same is also true for gold, diamonds and probably even Teflon and rubber. Artists must get over the hubris that makes them believe that their magic and transformational touch is able to efface our shared material and cultural history. And even those artists who wish to re-write that history have an obligation to know it, so that they may effectively undermine it.

We have often encouraged others to believe that an artist and their work are the same thing, but to become better thinkers and writers, better metalsmiths and a better audience we need to see arts criticism as the beginning of a dialogue, not as a personal attack. Most writing, and this includes criticism, is an interpretive process and assuming an intelligent and informed writer, artists must show the same willingness to interrogate their work from the critic's point of view as they expect the critic to interrogate work from the viewpoint of the maker. Occasionally personal agendas, pettiness and intrigue may slip by in the process, but it seems to me that that risk is warranted if it results in a field which is excited and motivated by the challenge found in the exchange of thoughtful commentary.

F C L

# Contents

**Summer 1994**
**Volume 14 Number 3**

Paulette Werger
*Spring Shallows*, 1992
fabricated fused sterling,
coverlite, 4 x 3 x 1/8"
See page 45

## Departments

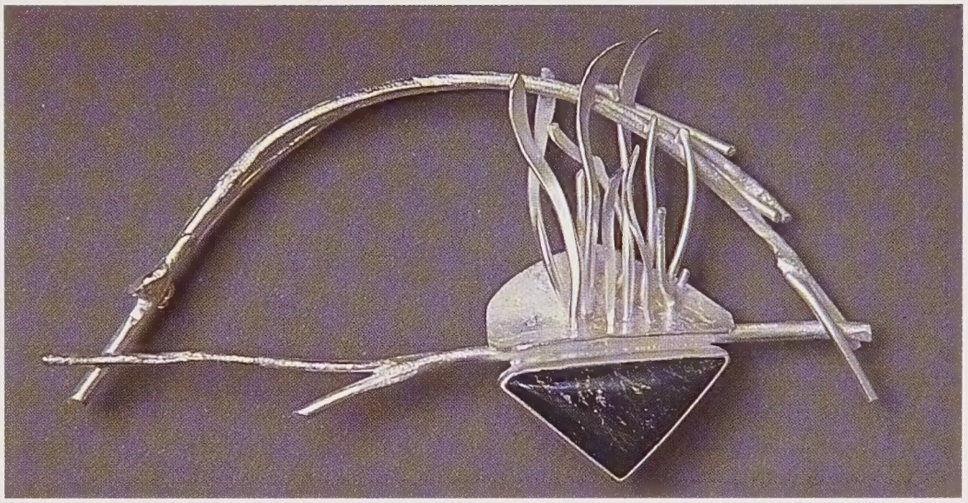
Editorial 4

Recent Sightings 6
*Bruce Metcalf*

Musings On The Future 10
*Robin McGee*

Book Review 12

Obituary: Ken Cory 12



**Cover**
Cheryl Rydmark, *Stair*, 1993, Pin
sterling, 18k Malaya Garnet,
yellow diamond, cast and fabricated,
2 x 1 1/4 x 3/16"
See page 14

## Features

Simplicity That Speaks 14
*Nancy Fawcett*

Three Johns and The Metal Arts in Long Island City New York 20
*Joan Kahr*

Remaking Material 32
*Erika Ayala Stefanutti and Gary S. Griffin*

## Reviews

The Ideal Home:
1900 - 1920 40
*by Matthew Kangas*

Fabergé,
Orfèvre des Tsars 41
*by Anne McPherson*

Enamelrama:
A National Invitational
Exhibition of Contemporary
Enameling 42
*by Allen Peterson*

Poetic Objects:
Contemporary American
Jewelry 43
*by Lorrie Blair*

Julie Anne Mihalisin:
Luminous Renderings,
New Jewelry 44
*by Karen Chambers*

Crossing Back:
New Work
by Paulette J. Werger 45
*by Katherine Rogers*

Artium's 4th Anniversary
An Exhibition
of 3 Master Jewelers 46
*by Lynn Brunelle*

Don Stuart:
The Challenge of Metals 47
*by Lois Etherington Betteridge*

Margaret Barnaby 48
*by Matthew Kangas*

# Recent Sightings

*by Bruce Metcalf*

## Jeweler's jewelers

There's a buzzword in the painting community: 'painterly'. I used to think it was pretentious; now I'm not so sure. A painterly painter is one whose application of paint is both skillful and gestural. John Singer Sargent or Willem deKooning are 'painterly": their paintings are full of lush brushstrokes and layers of color. The artists' 'touch', which is often compared to handwriting, is clearly visible. (On the other hand, Frank Stella of the 1960s, when his paintings were hard-edged, unmodulated stripes, would never be considered painterly.) It is an insider's term of appreciation for the sensual craft of painting, and those who pass the test are thought of as painter's painters.

If such a term exists for painting, why shouldn't there be 'jewelerly' jewelers? It couldn't be exactly the same thing as being painterly, because the craft is so different. A 'jewelerly' jeweler would have mastered the necessary skills, and would apply them in a virtuoso manner. But that virtuosity must be attuned to the scale and sensibility of jewelry: it couldn't be splashy or highly gestural. It would reflect an insider's love of the craft.

The granddaddy among living 'jewelerly' jewelers is Hermann Jünger, and his work shows several qualities that I think are useful to define what the word could mean. First, he has never expanded his scale even when all the 'New Jewelers' were making experimental body-sized ornaments. Jünger stayed close to the familiar Western restrictions for precious jewelry: his pins rarely exceeded about 2⅜" in any dimension. When he wanted to expand the scale of his jewelry, he arranged a number of coordinated small elements on a surface. Second, he has always exploited the traditional materials of fine jewelry – precious metals and stones – but in a way that is entirely contemporary, influenced by both abstract expressionist painting and African jewelry. Most of all, Jünger's work shows his amazingly deft touch: a subtle contrast of material, color, form, and surface; a confident mastery of his craft; and an unparalleled ability to instill a signature style of working into metal.

In the U.S. today, there aren't many jewelers who are very 'jewelerly', but among the best are Pat Flynn and Cheryl Rydmark. [See: "Simplicity That Speaks" in this issue of *Metalsmith* – ED.] I just saw Rydmark's new work at the massive Baltimore ACC show, and her work was like fresh breeze in an overheated room. Where other jewelers strain for effect, and where imitation is business-as-usual, the sensitivity and refinement of her jewelry was a true delight. Like Jünger and Flynn, she never works very large, she uses precious and semi-precious material, and she has a wonderful and subtle touch.

There are other qualities that might define the 'jewelerly' jeweler. Such work is always finely detailed, and fully resolved. Everything is considered: thickness of edges and bezels; the texture and color of the metal; the exact size and position of every element. Stones and metal and chains all fit together in a very satisfying way. And especially this: There is never a shortcut. Where lesser jewelers might use a simple or direct solution, Flynn and Rydmark use the best solution. They never use metal like cardboard. For instance, a standard tactic to produce a solid form is to bend a narrow strip of metal into a profile, and solder a top and bottom on. The resulting cube, circle, or donut is cheap and easy to make, but devoid of inflection. Rydmark files down thick sheet metal into shapes with softly rounded surfaces and sharp edges. The result is probably more costly to make than a constructed slab, but far more interesting. In the end, Rydmark's shapes are resonant and lyrical in a way that a flat construction could never be. It's also no coincidence that she has done extensive historical research on the shapes she uses, and is fully aware of their possible meanings. Her care in choosing her shapes is extended into her care in making them.

The best 'jewelerly' jewelry never appears rigid or mechanical. It is a simple matter to achieve a perfect surface on a lathe, or to construct a crisp geometric shape, but these techniques produce cold and un-inflected forms. Rigid geometry allows little room for personal touch. If there is such a thing as a jeweler's unique handwriting in metal, it has to appear in subtle modulations of form and surface. When Pat Flynn makes his brooches from nails, he carefully forges and files each one. He makes no effort to achieve uniformity, but moves instead toward variation. Each nail is slightly different in the curve along its length, in size, and in the way it is filed. The purposeful irregularities of handwork act as a signature of the craftsman, and a symbol of the human presence infusing the object.

Flynn's and Rydmark's works are beautifully finished. Both artists employ a number of different finishes in each object, contrasting polished edges with filed surfaces, and dark metal with bright metal. But for all the variety, each finish is totally consistent in itself. Wherever metal is polished, it is perfectly polished; where it is filed, the filing is uniform. Again, the 'jewelerly' finish is characterized by complete resolution and fine craftsmanship.

There is also an intangible quality that permeates Flynn's and Rydmark's work. Metalworking is a difficult craft, and ultimately the jeweler's motivation makes all the difference in the world. In a world that rewards the superficial, familiar, and cheap, a special resolve must keep the jeweler at her bench, making only the best that she is capable of making. I can find only one possible explanation: passion. We are accustomed to thinking that passion in the visual arts is manifested in grand, theatrical gestures, but here is another type of passion, a passion that is manifested in patience, painstaking labor, and a refusal to compromise. Both Flynn and Rydmark set a high standard for themselves, and they always live up to it. To the trained and sympathetic observer, it's evident that their standard is based on love: a love of the labor of jewelry-making and a love of jewelry. It's visible in Pat Flynn's perfectly polished bezels set in iron, and in Cheryl Rydmark's impeccably shaped pendants. They're just so *good* at loving what they do. That is why they are true jeweler's jewelers.

---

*Bruce Metcalf is a metalsmith and a writer on the crafts. He lives in Philadelphia, PA.*

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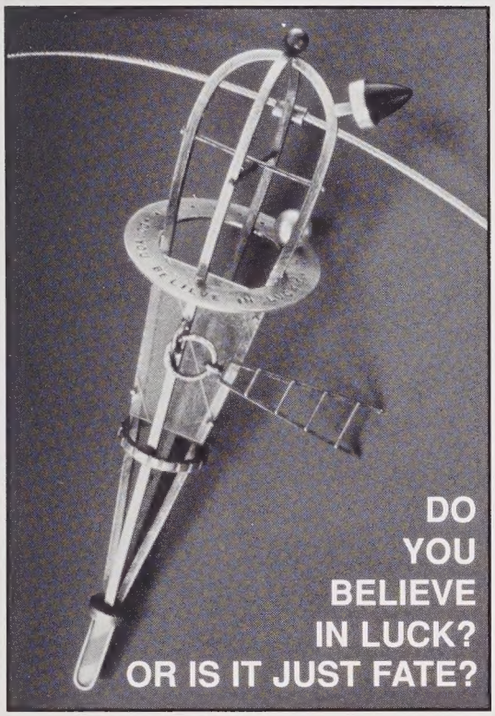
by THOMAS MANN

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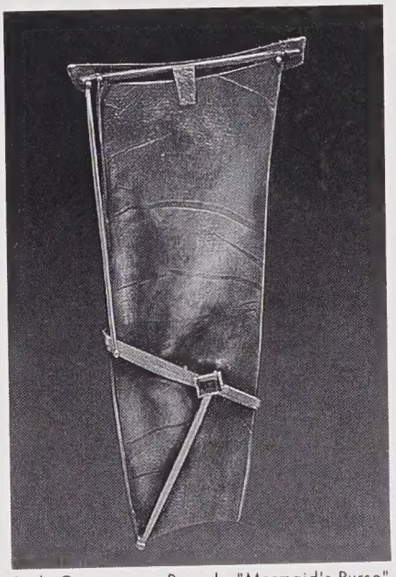

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# Musings On The Future

*by Robin McGee*

## The Internet – SNAG Connection

Despite all the talk about the information super highway, this Internet thing started, for me, when my wife came home from her graduate course in Old English. "I'm supposed to log on to some discussion group on a computer network," she said. Having used computers as a tool in my art work and teaching for a number of years, this caught my attention. "It's called the Anglo-Saxon network and it's on something called the Internet. I thought you might be able to figure out how I could do it from home since we have a computer and I wouldn't have to drive in and use theirs."

Such was my introduction to the Internet, and in the course of figuring out how to connect (which I did), I learned a great deal about the possibilities that are waiting to be tapped.

Many people have heard of Compuserve, America On Line, and Prodigy. Not as well known but vastly bigger in size and resources, the Internet stretches to all the continents (Antarctica too) and links over ten million users to libraries of data, research and academic facilities, and most importantly, each other.

What can this mean to metalsmithing and SNAG? Well, let's take the first thing that made me aware of the Internet: the discussion group mailing lists. Although discussion groups function though the use of e-mail, it facilitates group and interactive communication of a group much better than exchanging addresses, much like we do each year at conferences. Made possible by a software program called a "listserv", a group of people (i.e. metalsmiths?) subscribe to the list by sending in their e-mail address to the listserv. The size of the list can vary from 20 to 10,000. It is understood that the topics of discussion are to be limited to things such as techniques, materials, show and exhibition announcements, job openings, etceteras. Someone in the group posts a message (question, request for information, show announcement, etceteras.) to the listserv and the posting is automatically distributed to everyone on the list *in a matter of minutes!* Someone else checking their e-mail, minutes after it was posted, might have the answer or a response and post it a short time later. It's not uncommon for me to check my e-mail several times a day and find a number of messages each time. That is why they are called discussion groups. Apart from the lack of face to face contact, the effect is not much different from being at a conference and asking someone a question. They may or may not know the answer, but they may know who to ask and that person is probably standing in the next room. That's the point, the Internet allows for conference accessibility to the membership at any time.

If that's not enough, these groups usually keep records and pertinent information on file severs accessible to anyone with access to the Internet. A list of that information is normally available through the listserv as well. Imagine SNAG technical information, postings of workshops, and even image collections available to any member with a computer and modem. (In the last survey it was reported that a little less than half the membership has access to a computer.) Imagine a student asking a technical question during class and you don't know the exact answer. With access to the Internet (which more and more colleges are getting all the time) you could either ask the discussion group or access the group archives and have a good chance of handing him or her the answer before the end of the day, if not the end of the class. Or, more importantly, you could have the student sit down at the computer and find it him/herself.

How does one gain access to all this wonderful stuff? Here is what I did. I started with a Mac Plus (it doesn't take a lot of computing power) and a hard disk. I purchased a fast modem ($130), telecommunications software ($89), two more megabytes of RAM (memory) ($100), and three books ($75). The Internet connection through Msen of Michigan was $20 for the initial hookup and $20 a month for unlimited access. My grand total was $434. That's less than air fair to the SNAG Conference, at least from Detroit. You might not need to buy extra RAM and you can probably find the books in a library. That brings it down to $259. Better yet, if you're at a college or university, you probably can arrange free access to the Internet through the school's network or library system.

Can an Internet discussion group work for SNAG? Don't take my word for it. Ask your friendly neighborhood ceramist about it. NCECA already maintains a list called CLAYART and a file server with glaze recipes and information. Have him or her show you what it has done for NCECA. I'm on the list and I've accessed the file server. It is very impressive. But, remember, the Internet is only a tool. As with any tool, it's the people using it that make the tool work. The tool is there, waiting. All we have to do is pick it up.

To find out more about getting wired, I recommend *The Internet Starter Kit* by Adam C. Engst, *The Mac Internet Tour Guide* by Michael Fraase and *The Internet For Dummies* by John R. Levine & Carol Baroudi, or look in your local bookstore in the category "Internet."

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*Robin McGee is a teacher of metalsmithing who accesses the "Net" from Warren, MI.*

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# Book Review

## Hydralic Die Forming for Jewelers and Metalsmiths

*by Susan Kingsley*
20 – Ton Press, Carmel, California, 1993 ($19.95)
95 pages, 142 black and white photographs and illustrations
ISBN 0 - 9635832 - 0 - 4

Metalsmith and author Susan Kingsley has brought together her experience and resources in a practical, well written and carefully organized book. Offering the recent history of applications of the hydraulic press and guidance through numerous technologies, *Hydraulic Die Forming for Jewelers and Metalsmiths* is divided into five sections with discussions of equipment, non conforming dies, conforming dies, blanking dies, and die variations and combinations.

The discussion of equipment includes numerous possibilities for press frames, but somewhat disconcertingly emphasizes the frames and accessories available through Bonny Doon. While Lee Marshall the engineer behind Bonny Doon has produced an impressive selection of tools for the press, and even though the accessories mentioned greatly increase the applications of the press, they also serve to make inexpensive hydraulic arbor presses, those available through discount suppliers appear obsolete or inadequate ("not recommended"). Here the promotion of a brand name has somewhat over-shadowed the sharing of information and the accessibility of the technology. Inexpensive presses do not come with bolt-on accessories, but only require simple modifications to provide good service. For those interested in other tooling applications however, the discussion of accessories is thorough.

With a thorough understanding of equipment the reader is prepared for detailed discussion of numerous die technologies. The heart of the book provides a thorough presentation of an impressive variety of applications from basic matrix dies, to embossing and blanking. As an example the chapter on non-conforming dies makes a compelling case for the use of urethane over the more common sheet rubber often found in metals shops. The urethane has superior response to extreme pressures and is able to flow, and form material with greater resolution. Kingsley has wisely included health and safety precautions and information.

In an age of home shopping networks and info-mercials one cannot help but notice a certain pitching of products and applications in *Hydraulic Die Forming for Jewelers and Metalsmiths.* Like the QVC, emphasis is placed on products and information and less so on presentation and while the presentation is adequate it does not always serve the text as well as it could. In some instances, photographs lack contrast and do not illustrate details well. Yet despite these minor caveats, the total package offers the only text which assembles all of the recent jewelry and metalsmithing applications of the hydraulic press, and a thorough discussion of each technique and related appendices, a suppliers list and more. The field has recently seen numerous self-published books by our members, among those this one would certainly rank near the top. It would be a useful book for jewelers and metalsmiths of all levels, and at $19.95 a pretty good buy.

*Matthew Hollern is a metalsmith and an assistant professor of Metals and Jewelry at the Cleveland Institute of Art. He is also the technical editor of* Metalsmith.

## Ken Cory 1943 – 1994

Ken Cory, professor of jewelry and metalsmithing at Central Washington University, Ellensburg, WA, died of heart failure on January 16, 1994. He was 50 years old.

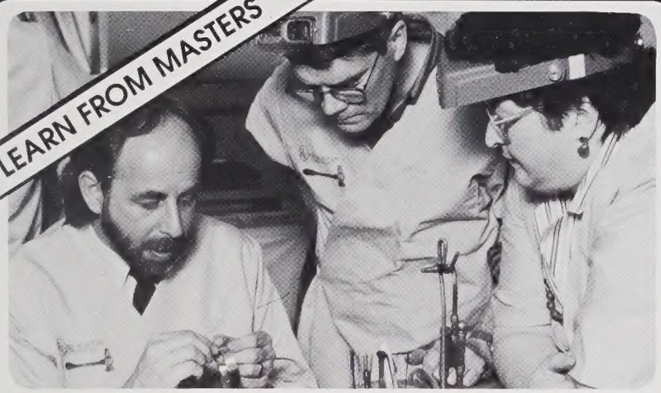
Always an iconoclast, Ken's early work was influenced by the West Coast Funk Art movement when he studied at CCAC in the 1960s. In the '70s, he collaborated with Les LePere as the Pencil Brothers and their enameled objects, some of them wearable, celebrated everyday objects in an archetypal context. In their work and life, they were often silly, naughty, bad boys teasing their audience with deceptively simple visual puns and riddles.

Working alone in the 1980s and '90s, Ken continued his exploration of archetypes and symbols, combining subtle humor with an appreciation for classic jewelry techniques and gemstones. His later production is elusive in its temporal references; the pieces look contemporary and yet could easily have been discovered in an ancient tomb. His work has been shown and published extensively and he was most recently honored by the Seattle Art Museum in their exhibition *Six Jewelers.*

Aside from his work, Ken will be remembered by friends, colleagues, students, and veterans of Vail for his acts of kindness, funny stories, impish pranks, and boisterous laugh. Although he cared about craftsmanship and quality, he never let technique preside over ideas. He pursued knowledge simply for the sake of knowing, whether it was repairing his MG or exploring 100 different ways to twist wire.

Undoubtedly he's looking down on us now while swapping escapades with Benvenuto Cellini and riding his mountain bike.

*Nancy Worden is a metalsmith, who was a student, colleague, and friend of Ken Cory.*

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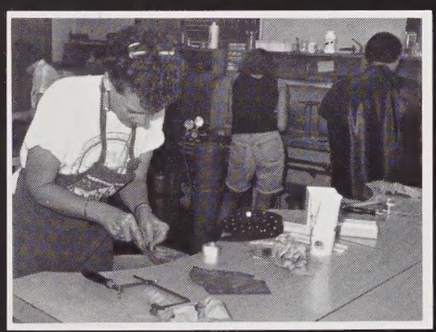

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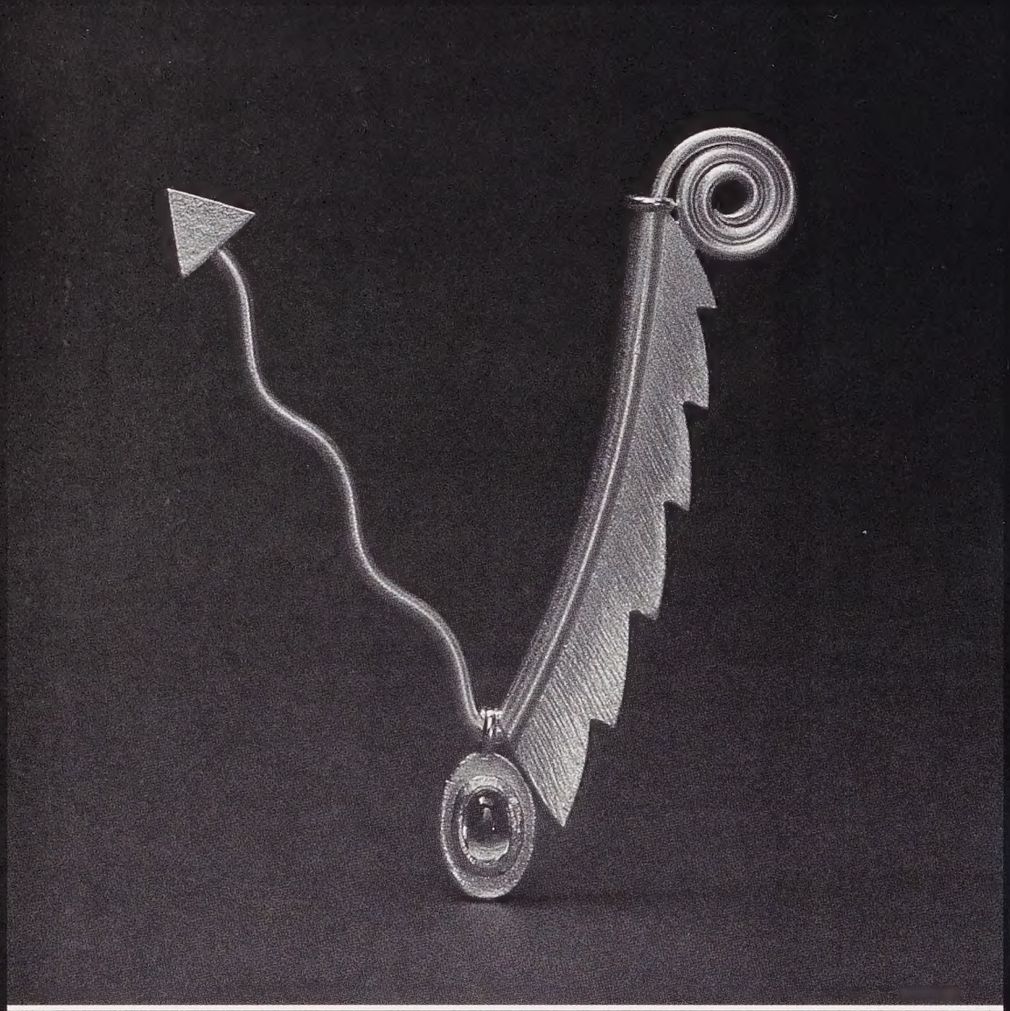
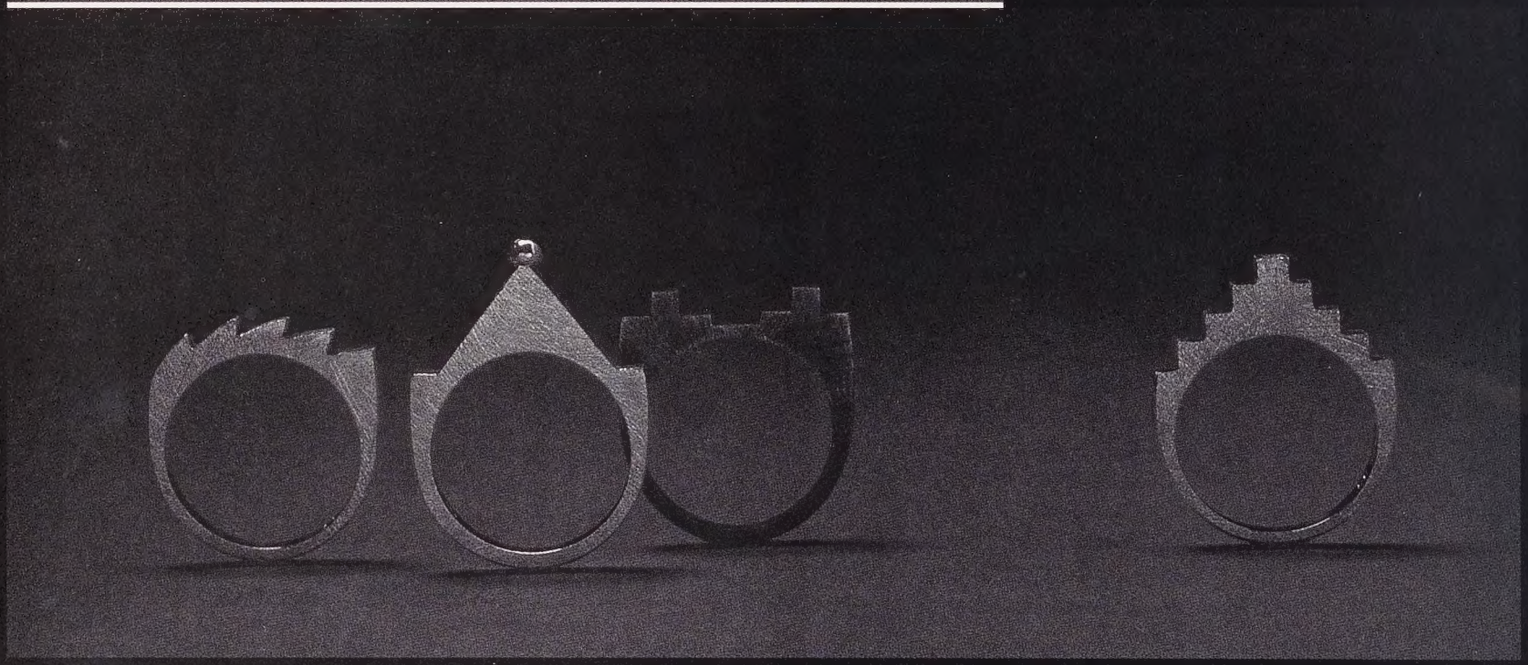




# Simplicity That Speaks

TEXT:

**Nancy Fawcett**

Twenty years of working with metal has given Cheryl Rydmark the confidence to create jewelry of great simplicity. Although the Minneapolis-based artist has mastered an impressive repertoire of techniques, she isn't interested in turning out objects that are merely a showcase for technical ability. Rydmark strives to create jewelry with purpose, pieces with a significance that is subconsciously understood by her audience. Using inspiration from tradition, ceremony, fantasy, and myth, she carefully designs spare but highly communicative artwork.

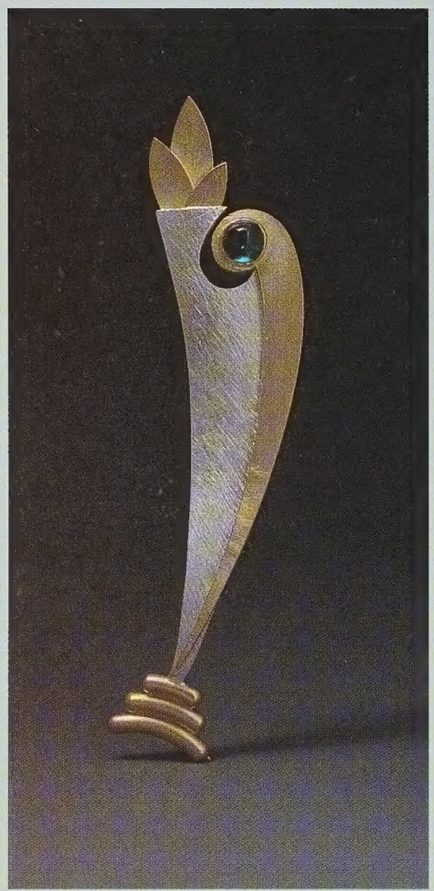
The philosophy behind Rydmark's work is the product of a cluster of events in the late 1980s. Around 1987, she attended a show at the Minneapolis Art Institute, which featured metalwork ranging from the sixth century B.C. to the early twentieth century and which marked a progression from simple, primitive forms to more involved, ornate pieces. Rydmark walked from case to case and came upon a trophy, which was encrusted with stones and other elaborate ornamentation. The splendid work was undoubtedly that of an accomplished artist, Rydmark recalls, and, ordinarily, she would have been impressed. But she then returned to the first case where a collection of simple Etruscan jewelry was displayed. "It was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen in my life. There was something about the simplicity that just spoke volumes of intention and meaning and power and point."

***Cupid*, 1993, Pin**
**sterling, 18k,**
**Malaya garnet,**
**cast and fabricated**
**1¾ x 1¼ x 3/16"**

Two years later, in the midst of a divorce, she was invited to participate in a Valentine's Day show. The artist began "pounding out" some hearts "...that looked absolutely pathetic. I was using these little round rubies and they looked like blood spots. The gold looked like stab wounds. I thought, I can't send these. These are awful. These look awful. These feel awful. I feel awful! I realized that I really did not need a valentine, what I needed was a lifesaver." So, she went to a fabric store, bought a button in the shape of a lifesaver, modified its shape, molded it, cast it in gold, set three diamonds in it and attached a chain "as if it were roped to a huge sailing ship." The response was amazing, Rydmark said. People were drawn to the soft smooth shape, which they could hold and feel like a worry bead. Her work filled a need "...that had nothing to do with decoration."

Rydmark's focus began to change after that Valentine's Day show and the Minneapolis art exhibit. The lifesaver was the genesis for jewelry that was more than just a surface for design. Up until then, her training as a painter had been interfering with the depth of her pieces. "I worked two-dimensionally too long in metal. Every pin, every creative piece that I did was pretty flat. And it never really wore right. It never served the function that I think, now, twenty years later, a piece of jewelry should." She began to work on pieces that could be held and touched, works that could be experienced not just viewed.

***Journey*, 1992, Rings**
**sterling, 18k,**
**cast and oxidized**
**1 x 3/4 x 3/16"**



Inspired by the primitive yet powerful work in the Minneapolis Art Institute's showcase of sixth century B.C. jewelry, Rydmark also began to study Etruscan and Mycenaen pottery and jewelry. She started to incorporate some of their concepts of adornment into her work and abandoned designs and materials that were incongruent to her newly defined more minimalist ideals. Through study and experimentation, Rydmark arrived at the philosophy that is richly embodied in her work today. "If you keep it simple and comfortable and exquisitely crafted and ever so slightly special, then it works."

The idea that she can limit materials and design and still create powerful pieces is reinforced by an education in Taoism. First introduced to its concepts in a religious philosophy class at the University of Minnesota, Rydmark found that the dynamic which Taoism espouses between humans and nature is the "perfect balance." She cites the impact of one particular Taoist verse:

*Thirty spokes converge at one hub;*
*What is not there makes the wheel useful.*
*Clay is shaped to form a vessel;*
*What is not there makes the vessel useful*
*Doors and windows are cut to form a room*
*What is not there makes the room useful*
*Therefore, take advantage of what is there,*
*By making use of what is not.*

Sculptures by Louise Bourgeois and Constantin Brancusi have also influenced the philosophy which now defines Rydmark's work. Bourgeois, like Rydmark, creates sculpture that is highly articulate but still subdued. The mathematical precision that surfaces in some of the patterning and carefulness of Bourgeois's work is used by Rydmark too. But it is Bourgeois's mastery of the subliminal that especially fascinates Rydmark. She first came across the concept in a book that Bourgeois wrote and Rydmark has never forgotten its significance. "I'm not that good with words. I'm not a good writer. But I think that I can take forms and images and manipulate them to say something. My pieces are a message and a statement. They are a content and an idea I have."

Rydmark feels that Brancusi's sculptures reinforce the idea that concepts can be successfully conveyed without excesses in design and materials. His ingenious combination of modern and ancient principles produced highly sensual artwork that Rydmark admires. "His form distillations are so unbelievable. When you see Brancusi's evolution – he had so much formal training and then he starts getting more abstract and more abstract and everything becomes so form-oriented and you can't help but go 'wow'." Additionally, Rydmark appreciates the agelessness of Brancusi's sculpture and the spirit that it shares with the Etruscan jewelry that was on display at the Minneapolis Art Institute.

The artist is metalsmith Herman Junger's biggest admirer; she'd love to have tea with him. Like Rydmark, Junger uses his considerable talent in frugal ways and strives to create jewelry that has the enduring qualities of ancient pieces. "It's very primal and powerful," Rydmark says. "It's not glitzy. And it's soft, not hard-edge geometric stuff." Junger also tries to be in tune with the bodies upon which his work will be worn and wants his jewelry to blend with the wearer. Utility is likewise a concern of Rydmark's. "There are a lot of jewelry artists out there who don't take into account when they are designing that their work is going to be worn on a body. I do. I really want the work to be worn."

***Vase*, 1993, Pin**
**sterling, 18k green tourmaline, fabricated**
**2⅝ x ½ x 3/16"**

Her work is often an expression of her respect for tradition and its rituals and symbolism. "I try to bring the past forward so that it isn't lost," she says. "I love ceremonial objects." Wedding bands offer frequent opportunities to merge the past and the future. Usually, she constructs the shanks with full-round wire, in honor of the round-round concept from as early as the sixth century B.C. The round wire and the round band symbolize the ideal of a loving commitment, where there is no beginning and no end, no top and no bottom. Rydmark also uses marquise diamonds in her wedding bands, an ancient symbol of a boat and, thus, a symbol of the journey that two people embark upon in a marriage. In other bands, she sets three diamonds to symbolize two people and their relationship, or she channel sets ribbons of diamonds to give the illusion of a rope: the entwining of two people's lives.

For the past two years, she has been working on a pendant series that features three main shapes – a shield, a torso, and a pod – along with other smaller charm elements. Her intent, based somewhat on the theories of Carl Jung, was to construct archetypal forms which would resonate with people. "They won't necessarily understand why they are drawn to it, but there is a reason. Some kind of through-the-ages, cross-cultural, real old, kind of feel."

One outstanding design in this series is *Dragonfly*, a pendant that she created out of an affection for the insect. Using gold, silver, and yellow diamonds, Rydmark only subliminally hints at the wing structure, body, and head. "You kind of sense that it's a dragonfly. And as soon as someone says it, then you realize, 'oh, right, I get it.' That's what's kind of fun about naming it, too." The series also features *Staccato*, *Platonic Parts*, and *Jar*.

The subliminal appears again in Rydmark's *Rubato* series. *Rubato* is a jazz term meaning unexpected rhythm, and Rydmark translates this into a necklace by varying the elements – sterling silver beads, gold, leaf-like charms, and miscellaneous precious stones – in an asymmetric arrangement. The arranged pieces also look much like the water drops on a long spider web that once hung near Rydmark's shower. "The water would collect and space itself, so that you'd have these drops of water and then it kind of looked like a line of music. I thought how wonderful it would be to be able to take that and put it around a person's neck." The artist makes two versions in the *Rubato* series – more and less expensive – because she thinks it's important to make jewelry for people who don't have a lot of money.

She also designs jewelry that reflects her appreciation for both whimsy and myth. "I try to remember to keep things light and whimsical instead of heavy, with a need to be on a pedestal. Sometimes work can be too self-important." Movies by Terry Gilliam have been particularly inspirational. "*Time Bandit* was a real eye opener for me because Gilliam uses mythology and brings it forward to modern times in a very funny whimsical way. It's not heavy-handed and it's kind of magical."

But Gilliam's *Baron Munchausen*, based on a German fairy tale, is Rydmark's favorite. She designed a group of pins, the *Baron* series, that "...had a similar kind of humor and whimsy to their imagery." The *Stair* pin was inspired by a lulling sequence featuring the man-in-the-moon and a ship that glides dreamily across the moon's sandy surface. Rydmark combines a garnet, a yellow diamond, a tiny gold crescent moon and sterling silver stairs in a pin imbued with gentle movement. Two other pins in the series, *Cupid* (or *Arrow*) and *Vase*, are similar in spirit. *Cupid*, inspired by a dance scene between the Baron and Venus, is quirkier than the more stately *Vase*, but both pins are highly fluid and show influences from ancient design.

Many of Rydmark's pieces begin as a result of dreams. "When my sleep is interrupted or it's kind of a light sleep, a lot of amazing images come through. And then I'll come back to the studio and maybe I'll have one idea, but as I start working, it changes into something else." Rydmark places no restraints on her "dance with the materials." Her sterling pendant, *Window*, which features a gold, almost balloon-like, ball in a window of the pendant, has its origins in a dream Rydmark had about gold balls soldered on a grid.

The technical groundwork for her work was established many years prior to her philosophical direction. Her comfort and expertise with almost every metalworking technique is something that she feels is key to the successful execution of her design. "My minimalist approach demands technical refinement."

Rydmark switched from painting, her first passion, to metalsmithing after realizing that, at the time, her only hope for a job would be in the greeting card industry. She went on to study art metals at the Minneapolis Technical Institute, the University of Minnesota, and San Francisco State University, where she earned her B.F.A.. At the Revere Academy of Goldsmithing, she perfected some diamond-setting techniques.

One of the more formative experiences in Rydmark's technical development was her 1982 - 83 stint as a journeyman goldsmith and diamond setter at the Van Craeynest, Inc. factory in San Francisco. The old-world setting was "wonderful," Rydmark says, "I was like Alice in Wonderland." She sat at a bench next to a master diamond setter and learned how to set diamonds in just about every way possible.

But she also learned a lot more. The factory was an educational playing field, where she was free to explore and she did. "I got to do a lot of different things and basically just played with metal and got really comfortable with it. It was way beyond anything I'd ever learned before. I came out of there feeling like there was very little I did not know how to do."

***Jar Dragon Fly Staccato,***
**1992, Pendants**
**sterling, 18k, cast and oxidized**
**2¼ x ½ x 3/16", 30" chain**

After she left the Van Craeynest factory and returned to Minneapolis, she began working with George Sawyer at Sawyer/Rydmark Design. In many ways, the partnership was ideal. Sawyer had the studio and equipment and Rydmark had the diamond-setting skills and production background, which enabled her to get work done and out the door relatively quickly. But, ultimately, it was a situation in which Rydmark could not thrive. "I made a lot of jewelry for rich people and I got really tense. I don't really care about big stones and people with a lot of money. I really like to glob paint on a brush and I like to bring that kind of creativity into my metalwork. But I didn't see an avenue to do that and market it through the Jewelers of America show" (where the duo typically exhibited). So, in 1986, she opened her own studio, where the idea was to "have more fun, to make freer designs, and to market them through the American Craft shows."

Today, in her downtown Minneapolis studio, she continues to explore. "My studio is a little prototype shop for research and development. I come in with an idea and take it as far as I can. Sometimes it ends up being a one of a kind piece, but, if not, then it goes into production." Rydmark gets production assistance from two students, who are gaining valuable experience under her tutelage. But she is careful not to impose too much of her philosophy upon them. "I try very much to not influence them. It's really important for them to find their own voice."

***Platonic Parts,* 1993, Pendant**
**sterling, 18k,**
**cast, fabricated, and oxidized**
**2⅜ x ½ x 3/32", 30" chain**

Rydmark, feels that she has found her voice: "...it's really strong. I feel that I've hit my artistic stride." Her confidence fuels the drive necessary to keep her work fresh and her studio thriving. "Running this business is like keeping seven or eight plates spinning at the same time." At the moment the "eighth plate," has grant applications on it; Rydmark would like the freedom to do more one-of-a-kind pieces. "If it were up to me, I'd just play, because there's never any lack of ideas. If I could just take one concept that I'm working on and take it through until I was totally bored with it, that would be the best."

Minneapolis's bitterly cold winters and relatively low cost of living have given Rydmark the opportunity to be introspective. "I do believe that something about the Midwest has helped the foundation of my work as far as the artistic side. You really get lost in ideas because there's very little else to occupy your time. I can't go to the ocean, so my work has become my ocean." Still, Rydmark cannot wait to return to California's Bay area of goldsmiths, where she felt strongly connected.

Were she not contemplating design ideas for jewelry, Rydmark might be manipulating the genetics for a drought resistant strain of potato. She once considered using her abilities in science and math to pursue a career in research botany. The decision to pursue art instead is a choice that she still ponders. "I sometimes think what I do is frivolous and when I look back on it, I might have gone into science. I think that would have been a very worthy career and I would be very happy with that." And, yet, she sees her present career as one that still provides her with an avenue for societal contributions. "Every time that I make a wedding set for a couple, I think that that's pretty good, too, because it's part of those kinds of commitments that people make to each other to help each other out and in their own way make the world a better place. I'm not saving the world, of course, but I'm actually doing something that I think is kind of wonderful."

*Nancy Fawcett is a writer on the arts who lives in St. Paul, Minnesota.*

GREED
1929

GROWTH
HOPE
1991

# Three Johns and The Metal Arts in Long Island City New York

Text by Joan Kahr

Photographs by Lisa Garner

It is rare to enter a commercial building where the entry space is at once a visual energizer and a theater of consciousness raising, a tri-level experience of iron and steel art on the walls, floors and ceilings. Three young metal sculptors known as the "three J's": John Carter, Johnny Swing and John James Veronis Jr., from Alaska, Connecticut and New York, respectively, were given carte blanche to decorate 60,000 square feet of a 125,000 square foot ground floor of the 80 year old building, formerly Macy's warehouse, in Long Island City.

Upon entering a visitor can stop at the information desk which is made of rows of welded steel piping. Near the desk large, welded cut steel "?" and "!!" dangle from the ceiling. A narrow hall leads to a sign made out of an oil tank found in the building. "Caution Recycling In Progress" proclaims the credo of the metalsmiths.

The metalsmiths' artistic concerns began to intermingle when Johnny and John met at Maine's Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in 1986 where they formed a working relationship scavenging objects to be used as points of departure for the compound and complex shapes that Johnny Swing in particular was seeking. John Carter's procedure was to take a functional object, transform it, and turn it into something with an imaginary utility. Later the two met Veronis, known as J.J., and they joined forces to create over 125 sculptures over an 18 month period using objects found in dumpsters and on the street. All three say that drawing is their base and welding, rather than forging, allows them to realize concepts that vary in scope from the serious, to the humorous, to the poetic. They revel in the challenge to manipulate and change the meaning of a used door handle or an abandoned fire hydrant. When they discovered an obsolete machine shop in the Bowery, the three J's delighted in redefining the contents of the shop and saving the detritus from being sent to Japan to be melted down for use in new cars.

Feeling the spirit and the soul of old metal toys, tools, or pipes, the metalsmiths view found objects as multidimensional; having had a previous function and meaning these objects can be made to metamorphose and adopt new and multiple meanings. They do not want the viewer to get stuck on the recognizable object, rather they hope their sculpture will be seen as independent of the objects' original function and purpose. Several years of correlative experiences allowed the artisans to share ideas and fashion a methodology for working as a triumvirate. Like story tellers who take turns adding to a tale, the metalsmiths pool their ideas; one person's weld is passed to the other, who adds parts and changes shapes and, like storytellers, the three J's were seeking a venue, an audience.

LEFT
Tile floor with welded inlays

LEFT
Big elevator, entrance

ABOVE, TOP
Head in Car #11

ABOVE, BOTTOM
Small elevator, entrance

By 1991 when they met the owner of 47–44 31st Street, known as the Factory, they were ready to embark on a unique artistic adventure. It would be the perfect marriage between a visionary and vision makers. According to Ted Nering, who oversees the management of the building for the Corporate Life Insurance Company, the metalsmiths were free to fill the immense space as long as they paid attention to building codes and safety specifications; there was no censorship, no editing. What began as the Factory's lobby is now turning into a mall with such tenants as an orchestra, a security alarm company, a bowling and billiard corporation, and a health and beauty store. Plans are also under way for three restaurants and other shops that will be part of this ground floor labyrinth. At first prospective tenants were leery of signing on to leases in such an unusual building; but in a short time, jewelers, and furniture, clothing, and accessories manufacturers filled the upper floors. Now occupants actually enjoy riding in the unusual elevator cabs.

The project began with car #11, a converted freight elevator large enough to easily accommodate 60 people. For two months the three J's worked inside the cab. They built a skeleton from old shelving found in the building and then covered the frame by hand hammering 70 pieces of sheet metal, rounded the corners and welded, painted and epoxyed the formerly rectangular space into a visceral cavern. Seven motorized heads, including those of a king and a gorilla, shake as the cab moves and from their high perches the heads look out on the swirling orange and metallic-green wall, and the purple floor. The heads are comprised of saw blades and drill bits in homage to the tenants who are jewelers. At the back of the cab a pipe railing leads to a porthole window faced with mirrored glass, which further emphasizes the incredible atmosphere and depth of the space. In the words of John Carter: "It was really almost natural for us [building the elevator], it was our gestation chamber and we built a womb and then we exploded out of it."

Water, a prominent motif of this project, relates to the concepts that we are birthed from water, we evolve through life dependent on water, and ultimately we must realize the importance of conserving water. From the elevator out into the hall "Do you remember water?" is written in multi-colored mosaic made of crushed electric light bulbs. Eventually, 5,000 square yards of mosaic will be laid in the lobby.

For the elevator facade John Carter, having in mind the artificial sounding phrases of certain world leaders during the Reagan/Bush years, fashioned a risible clown with a tape deck for a mouth. The head is made from a helium cap used to blow up balloons at birthday parties, while the hair, nose, hat, and bow tie are borrowed from a plastic toy. The eyes are made out of 1940's telephone speakers. In the clown's hand is an old ray gun concealing a motion sensor which, when triggered, makes the buffoon move his mouth and sing like Pagliaccio. For Carter the multi-armed clown, derivative of a Tibetan God, is a statement about power and political leaders who sometimes appear more like court jesters.

On each side of the elevator doors are columns containing wire mesh portholes which reveal John Veronis's dancing figures made from the debris of jewelers which also become activated by a motion sensor. Accompanied by music these whirling creatures reference music boxes whose ballerinas twirl on one leg. The intricate motor mountings and electrical work are accessible through hidden doors and partitions to allow for repairs. Here waiting for the elevator is an anticipatory occasion in which the passenger feels like a member of a performance art troupe.

LEFT
Guard's Desk and Office entry

Johnny and John wanted to fabricate a large elevator button that would work no matter where it was touched and that also could be pushed by someones' backside if their hands were full of packages. The result is a large saddle-shaped piece of metal filled with cut out arrows and letters spelling "Push". The underside of the metal is packed with melted plastic and backed by folded leather which gives the button a bellows-like movement. When the elevator button is pressed, it causes huge fantasy fighting fish down the hall to joust with their galvanized pole snouts and move vigorously while snorting and clanging. These ferrite fish, whose bodies are formed from a 55 gallon oil drum and a large propane tank, have fire extinguisher tails, and skate board wheels for flippers. Nearby structural columns that J.J. has covered in hourglass-shaped feminine forms of sheet metal, also have attached blinking lights of red and green that flash all day.

As a child growing up in Manhattan, Veronis had a fascination for bridges and skyscrapers. However, it wasn't until a chance encounter in a machine shop in Denver where he learned the rudiments of arc welding that he realized the tactile and malleable possibilities in metalwork. At the University of Colorado, he helped to revive a dormant welding studio and graduated with a fine arts degree emphasizing sculpture and welding. Only recently J.J. discovered that his great-grandfather was a blacksmith in Greece. The artist's inherent love of metal can now be legitimately explained.

If the big elevator offers an almost disorienting environment, J.J.'s small elevator #10 is intimate and topical. Veronis imagined this cab as a metal cave with the walls covered in welded hieroglyphics. Actually, he drew quotes and pictographs with a mig welder, a permanent graffiti. Famous and self-composed sayings deal with equality, balance and focus as a means of addressing life. Martin Luther King's: "A Man Can't Ride Your Back Unless It's Bent" is followed by pictograms of four stick figures drawn in various bracing and supporting motions. Underneath "Increase The Peace" is a drawing representing the backbone that holds a person upright. On the back wall of the carriage "We Must Use The Time Creatively" is followed by symbols of production including musical notes, an anvil, a hammer, and a dancing foot.

Also in the elevator are symbols from West African tribes such as the Yoruban circle with four dots meaning watchful eyes or awareness. A sculptural frieze depicts five heads with each one lacking one of the five senses. These heads look like tribal masks and are ornamented with jewelry in reference to the many Hasidic Jewish jewelers that work in the building. Found objects are cleverly utilized for another frieze of hands which gesture various universal signals: pointing, reaching, beckoning, making peace, saying halt and showing claw-like distress. A quotation by Eldrege Cleaver: "The Price of Hating Other Human Beings Is Loving Oneself Less," as well as symbolized aphorisms of Duke Ellington, John F. Kennedy and Robert Kennedy which address self-fulfillment, goals, helping others, and the elimination of greed, and prejudice. The entire elevator functions as a Braille book that holds homilies for the blind, as well as for the sighted, who, figuratively speaking, do not see. After the Los Angeles riots in April of 1992, a passenger scratched "L.A. Rip" into the elevator wall. J.J. did not think of the act as defacement, but rather saw it as an augmentation of the graffiti that he had already provided.

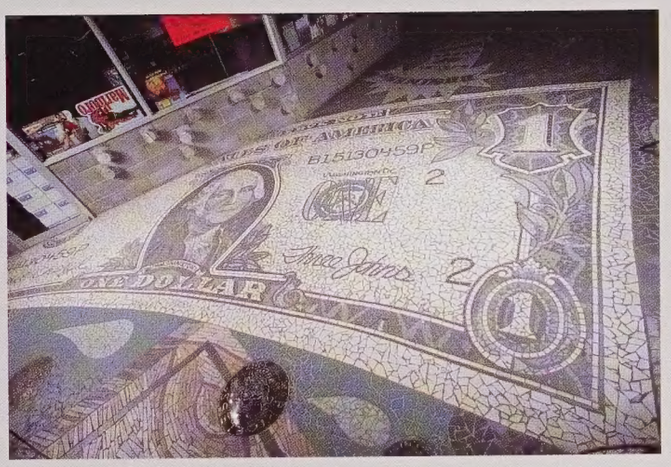
If 20 years from now, people wanted to know what some of the social concerns were in the early 1990's they would find both subtle clues and blatant expostulations in this building which is just a ten minute ride from mid-town Manhattan. A case in point is a wall and ceiling area that was created out of two discarded school buses by John Carter. The index finger of a 15 foot high yellow hand points to a fragmented and skewered upside down school bus that covers the wall and hangs from the ceiling in a tortuous and shard filled, jolting sequence. An allusion to New York City's troubled school system, this sculpture is disconcerting. John Carter stated: "in taking a functional object and turning it into something else, it takes your [the viewer's] life and changes it from the pedestrian to the philosophical."

BELOW
Wall of underwater creatures

NEXT PAGE, TOP LEFT
Sea Urchin

NEXT PAGE, TOP RIGHT
Dollar bill floor mosaic

NEXT PAGE, BOTTOM
Crank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ONE DOLLAR

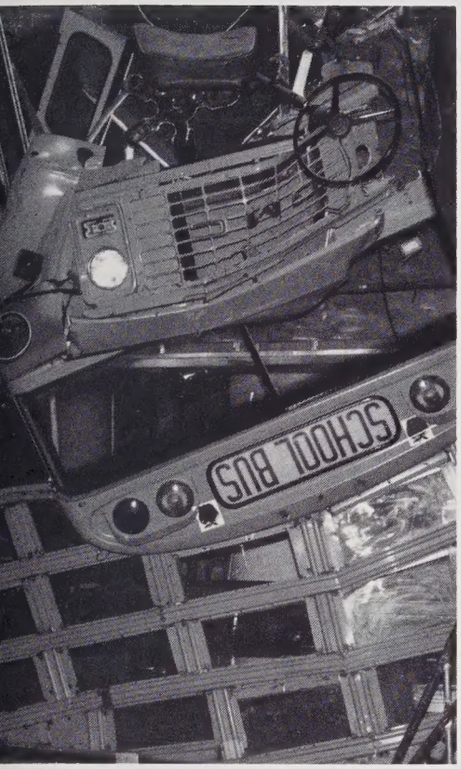
Flowing out of the school bus section is an expanse of shelving strips that Johnny Swing has crafted into an organic, sinuous, 40 foot long arch that moves away from the elevator hugging the walls and the ceiling while moving around some structural columns in a way that can best be described as the Eiffel Tower turned sideways and shaken. This super-eminent structure is a poetic passage of speed and motion. Swing, who began welding and sculpting at the age of thirteen, was very influenced by his mother, an artist. Recently he passed the rigorous Class 1 welding examination in New York which took him three years to complete. Swing is a founding member of the metal sculpture studio *Gas Station* on the lower East Side of Manhattan. This studio is an inspiration and a haven for many struggling and experimental artists. In speaking about his artistic concerns, he says about his work: "They have a potential energy about them, they are in the process of moving or have the ability to move further....The arch has the elegance of a bridge but without the stasis...It's about movement as in an arm that passes from here to there. It's an attempt to capture motion visually in suspended animation, as in a line of smoke or a cartoon speed line."

A metallic garden tended by J.J. Veronis contains giant flowers made of industrial boiler pipes which sprout pistils of twisted elevator cable. On the wall, pinched wheel rims become giant flower heads surrounded by coiled metal moss and squiggly fertile fungi (in reality car and truck springs). In the middle of this fruitful field is a watchful sacred eye recycled from the huge, blown blue glass bulb of a chandelier. Around the eye, tentacles and spaghetti-like leaves add to the abstract language that includes imaginary insects, snakes, centipedes and vegetal mushroom forms. An undisguised tractor seat seems right at home with rebar, nuts, and bolts which were found on an expressway overpass nearby. In a strange process of industrial photosynthesis mosaic tiles creep from the floor to the wall in finger-wave vine-like forms. This contemplative garden is fenced with brown patinaed pipes, which the artists retrieved from the cooling system of the fur storage vaults of Macy's warehouse.

Veronis, an admirer of the sculptors Richard Stankiewicz and Julio González, has a distinct style marked by primitive figures that reveal a keen appreciation for African art, and for the high esteem accorded to blacksmiths in many of those cultures. A good example of this style is seen in the *Crank* piece next to the fence. Old elevator and tire parts, piping and bolts have been conjoined, while nearby small figurines spin on a circular platform that is worked in a Rube Goldberg set up by a large handle marked by cut out letters: "Crank". The figures are reminiscent of West African funerary pieces called *asen* which were made by the Fon in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The artists delightfully imbue humor in their works which move in peculiar rhythm to emanating bonks and beeps. Above the entrance to the offices of the Queen's Symphony Orchestra is a gong which clangs on a large steel plate covered with welded musical references. This piece can be set in motion by the office receptionist, and is augmented by the resonance of steel bells hanging from ropes nearby which can be played by the building workers and tenants. Verbally echoing the sculpture and the artistic goals of a symphony are the words "Knowledge", "Priceless", "Freedom", "Growth", and "Music Makes You Happy" embedded into the tile floor.

On another area of the floor viewers see a steel target and arrow which points upwards to a heavy length of railroad chain and a porcupine-shaped sea urchin perched high on the ceiling. When the visitor tugs on the chain a pulley system causes the creature's mouth to open and close, yacking out clanging sounds. Amoebae-like welded steel organisms throughout the mosaic floor metamorphize into bones, the ends of which are attached to wrenches, hammers, and screwdrivers; again alerting us to humanity's evolutionary path from water.




ABOVE
Detail: "The Hand of God"
Bus Wall

LEFT
Elevator Button

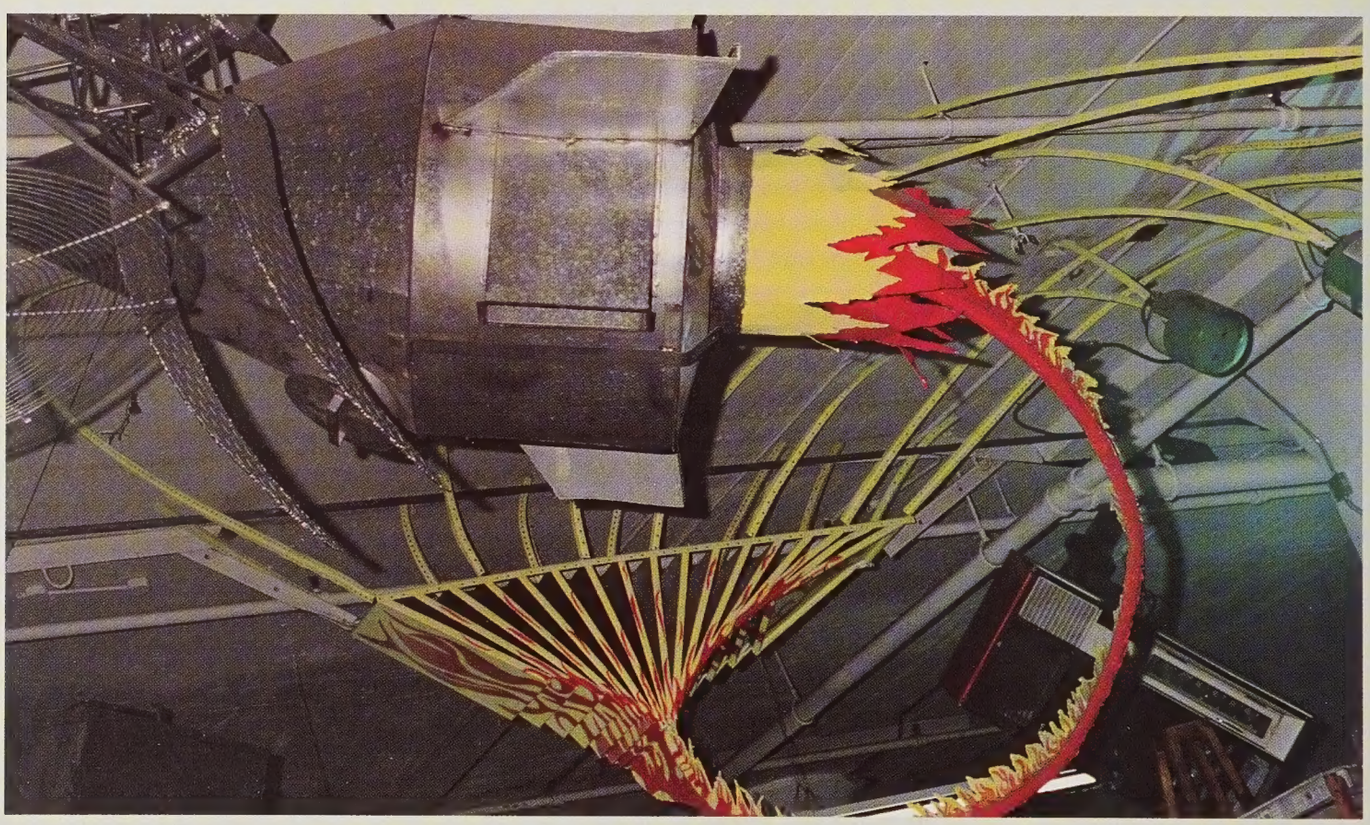
While in art school, John Carter vacillated between choosing a career in advertising or car design. Disillusioned by technology, particularly the ill effects on the environment by the automobile, Carter thought instead, he would become a painter. He credits his teacher in Cleveland, Jerry Adlin, with directing him toward metal sculpture. Adlin referred him to the Skowhegan School where he began welding in earnest, and where his important friendship with Johnny Swing was sparked, stating that, "Johnny was in the eye of a hurricane and from the center of it, he was making things that were beautiful."

Carter's work transforms found objects into unknown ones, as if they were being seen by someone from another planet, or from another time. *Hall of the God of Automobiles* includes a monumental steel face made of car parts: rotating hub cap eyes, and a mouth made from a small car trunk. From the god's cone shaped body and pointed tail a comet-like assemblage of recovered road signs, license plates, exhaust manifolds, wheel rims, hub caps, steering columns, radiators, and springs swirl. Carter, who has titled this *Hurricane Car-Mille*, a play on the infamous storm Camille, has put a brass railing in front of this construction, making of it a relic or curiosity of a museum time line.

The mosaic floor in this area contains a wealth of interesting welded steel inserts that further explicate the artist's ideas. The pictographic story begins with single-celled creatures, followed by fish floating in water, and continues through the evolution of humanity. Eventually humans build cars to transport themselves and they dig up decomposed dinosaurs to burn as fuel in their vehicles. Cynical and humorous references to oil spills and political policies based on the need for oil are interspersed with other steel plates on which have been welded a litany of familiar advertisements such as: "The Heartbeat of America Is Today's Chevrolet", and "Have You Driven A Ford Lately?". Statements about built-in obsolescence as a factor in industry's products, and the conditioning of American values through high powered advertisements are peppered throughout the factory. The *Arch of Appliances* begins at its base with a column of car doors holding upside-down, working, television sets. Presenting inverted TVs as decorative, electric lights, rather than as constant entertainment and venues for automobiles advertisements alerts the viewers to the ever present barrage of media inducements. The *Arch* sweeps to the ceiling with old bathroom sinks, steel water fountains, and sewing and washing machines; exhibiting both old and new artifacts from an unknown excavation site. Influenced by childhood memories of visits to the Chicago Museum of Science and Industry and the Museum of Natural History, John has created a unique historical repository of the twentieth century.

It is interesting to note that the notion of fish sculptures was never actually discussed by the three J's and yet each metalsmith independently was drawn to fish as a metaphor for the project. Their primordial creatures abide in an aquatic underworld that is unusual and poetically beautiful. Schools of iron fish swim in one direction while below a simulated ocean bed made of broken and shattered chunks of molded plaster and pastel-colored tiles explode from the floor to the wall. Amoebae and paramecium forms in purple-green and lavender tiles, cover the wall in a lovely Gaudiesque design. The tile work was executed by a team of artists according to color-coded diagrams by the three J's. Here the interrelation between the fish and the cool ocean bed affirms the harmony of the natural world if undisturbed by humans and elicits a pleasurable assault on the senses of the visitor.

Ruthless Health and Beauty, a large convenience store located in the lobby of the Factory, was the idea of the building's owner. Referencing pop-art idioms, the store announces its wares with hugely over-sized, painted, everyday objects made by the artists. Swinging over head is a hot water heater toothpaste tube, a No-Doz bottle made from an old filing cabinet, a giant lipstick tube fabricated from a fire extinguisher and pipes, and a garbage can roll-on deodorant stick. The genuine items are displayed on steel shelving arranged in an off kilter, topsy turvy way, suggesting the frenzy and whiplash of modern materialism. At first one may feel the need to purchase an equilibrium stabilizer but after a few minutes the dizziness vanishes and a perpetual smile becomes a free souvenir.



LEFT, TOP
Bus wall, "Hand of God",
and floor mosaic

LEFT, BOTTOM
Crane rescuing lost satellite

BELOW
Neptune on ceiling,
Bathtub God

In the mosaic tile floor outside the entrance a huge one dollar bill, complete with George Washington, has been depicted. While addressing commodities and commerce in general, the artists' work also refers to their concern about environmental and industrial pollution, and the costliness of national policies that waste money, energy and natural resources. The entrance displays a fleet footed Mercury who sports a winged hat made from a giant gear, and is surrounded by flames caused by ozone depletion. He sends a message regarding the contamination of the seas to Neptune who rules from an old bathtub. Neptune is humorously constructed with a car muffler body and tail pipe arms, and has webbed feet that adopt a swimming motion. Nearby a large assortment of kitchen materials: an old fashioned stove, a refrigerator and a fry pan unite in a vortex out of which emanate noxious Freon fumes escaping from the refrigerator, further decimating the ozone layer. A 15 foot grotesque fish crafted out of trash found on the Long Island Expressway rebukes humanity's ecological trespasses. Another contemporary concern for the artists is global space exploration and the potential consequences of satellites orbiting the earth. A group of sculptures allude to both the Hubble telescope rescue mission and other malfunctioning or lost space stations, through their quirky and kinetic, symbolic portrayals of astronauts in space.

At a time when the lobbies of most commercial buildings are made of dry wall, slick marble and granite, and starkly finished stainless steel, the Factory lobby is composed of recycled iron and glass. While the majority of American malls have become bland pathways for shoppers, the Long Island City space is alive with metal and mixed media sculptures that prod and poke viewers, causing them to smile, to examine, to laugh and to reflect about their environment. The building has been on its present site for almost a century. It no longer sits quietly on the street, known only to the people who work there, but today it has become a vital part of the neighborhood. This functional space now has an added dimension, its art engages people of diverse backgrounds who come in to browse, to shop, and to work. The occupants of 47–44 31st Street display a proprietary air as they show business associates around the artistic premises.

At the far end of the lobby is a wall with giant three-dimensional aluminum letters that spell "Yes". Fashioned by John Carter out of air conditioning ducts, the "Yes"s are surrounded by Swing's very small "No"s. For Johnny, John and J.J. this project represents a giant yes, an affirmation of their ideas and their work. The positive visualization on this wall also serves to remind the viewer that the disappointments and difficulties of life can be overcome. Visions and dreams can be realized. Perhaps these energetic and imaginative metalsmiths were predestined to change the 80 year old building: when they finished the large elevator the huge space of the lobby was hidden by a wall. They were told to remove the wall and forge ahead into the vast area. When the partition was taken down the three J's laid eyes on the original bricks of the building, which to their astonishment were clearly marked "JJJ". Whether destiny, fate or just a prescient business decision, this project should certainly be an inspiration for broader based collaborations between real estate entrepreneurs and artists in other cities.

Joan Kahr is a decorative arts historian
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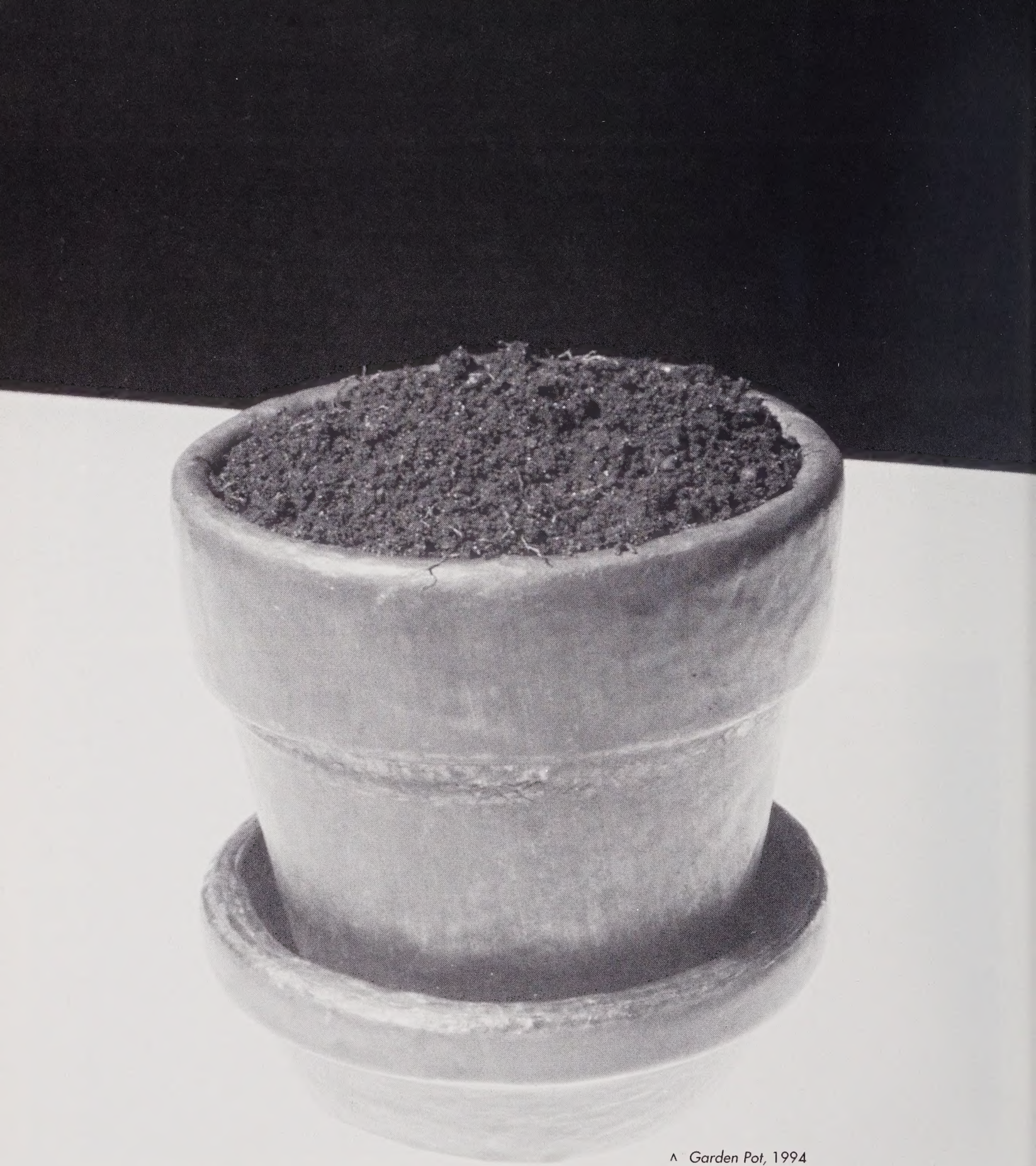

^ *Garden Pot,* 1994
Erika Ayala Stefanutti and Gary S. Griffin
lead, earth, 5 x 4.5″

*Putti upholding globe*
from *English Leadwork, Its Art & History.*
L. Weaver, FSA. London, 1909,
reissued by Benjamin Blom, Inc.
New York, NY. 1972

# Remaking Material

TEXT:
**Erika Ayala Stefanutti and Gary S. Griffin**

Contemporary American Studies scholar Ken Ames has stated that the time has long passed when one can celebrate the objects they look at uncritically.[1] And this is precisely the situation for metalsmiths. No longer can we examine an object and speak of it only in formalist terms. The time has gone when we can look at a diamond ring and speak of the materials from which it is made as neutral. Nor can we celebrate the meaning of material without consideration of its histories (social, cultural, economic, etc.). Given this, what criteria can metalsmiths use to interrogate their work? Is it viable to assume that beliefs inherited as a result of one's membership in a specific culture are appropriate and useful in finding meaning and value in objects? We offer this paper as one attempt to find a method for looking at objects critically, a method born of the act of making.

This is a unique period in history. For the first time, human beings are offered the possibility of disembodied experiences through 'virtual reality' games and simulation-type educational tools. Thinkers from around the world are speaking to issues regarding the body, describing the redefinition of what it actually means to be human, of what it means to be *physical* entities, and how that physicality is valued or not. As a result of these various negotiations, makers are presented with alternative lenses through which they can *re-view* the meaning of the objects they make as well as their working process: a process which centers on the physical object.

We are interested in naming the distinctions that exist between the physical and the non-physical in order to more fully understand both. Armed with these distinctions makers may more clearly define the instrumentality of both the physical and non-physical aspects of the objects they make. As we were working, we asked, what is it about the shift from image, word, or idea to physical object that is so powerful that it alters our reality on both an individual and societal level?

This is an argument for study[2], for a continuous examination and reexamination of the methods makers use to evaluate craft objects. Through the consideration of the act of making, together with the recognition of the socio-political and cultural histories of the material with which makers work, this field can construct a dialogue and a crafts criticism that will extend the resonance of craft objects. It is not our intention to administer to the metalsmithing community a set of concrete solutions. Rather, we "call for a [working] life lived attentively."[3]

Working attentively requires makers to examine the methodologies they use to interpret the objects they make. Specifically, makers need to re-evaluate their definitions of material, because at present they seem inadequate. A critical element in remaking craft is the re-evaluation of material. The most common assessments of objects have considered the physical as inferior to the idea, with little acknowledgment of the ways in which physical objects and their media contribute to meaning.

As an example of the kind of material investigation we describe, we have constructed a case study of one particular material, lead. This study consists of written information as well as information in the form of several physical objects.

> *"We cannot think well as long as we are locked into old errors that are so familiar as to be virtually invisible. It is my particular purpose to bring those errors to the surface, to characterize them as errors, to show how they have worked and still work to distort and limit our thinking, and so our knowledge, and so our selves and the world we share."*[4]

## Foundations

"It is the theory which decides what can be observed." EINSTEIN

What is observed and valued in craft objects is defined and often delimited by the ideology, or the method which makers employ to approach and validate those objects. As members of cultures, craftspeople have inherited definitions of what it means to be a maker, as well as the criteria with which to judge the quality of the works they produce. It is often the case, however, that inherited ideologies are no longer appropriate or adequate to describe the objects we make today. It is within every maker's power to construct additional challenges and discourse, questioning and expanding ideologies from within the field to invigorate their activity as metalsmiths.

**Without it the Man of Steel would not have prevailed.**
**The kryptonite was rendered harmless when encased in its lead coffin.**

Individuals' societies provide them with working ideologies: inherited, culturally produced beliefs that influence tastes, desires, intuitions, etceteras. Ideologies are powerful because they not only describe the way things are, but they prescribe a dominant culture's ideas of the way things ought to be.[5]

**The Romans were not so fortunate as they borrowed sapa, an ingredient to keep green wine from souring, from the Greeks.**
**Sapa was made by slowly simmering sweet grape juice with spices and herbs for days in covered pure lead kettles. The sapa, containing several thousand parts per million lead was added to their diet.**
**Analyses of Roman bones indicate that people in the lower economic classes had twice as much lead in their bodies as typical Americans today, while wealthy Romans may have had four times that amount.**
**Several thousand years ago, lead was a crucial factor in the glory, madness, and downfall of one of the greatest empires in history.**

At the root of many attitudes and beliefs about material and the physical itself, is the belief that the mind and the body are two distinct realms, with the physical or bodily realm always inferior to the intellectual, or non-physical. The sources of this idea show that the superiority of mind over the body is not innate, but a consciously constructed belief.

**The desire for silver was the principal stimulus for lead production until recent times.**
**Lead mined and smelted for itself constituted a significant portion of total lead production only during the past century. Until several centuries ago, about four hundred tons of lead were obtained as a smelted by-product for each ton of silver produced by the cupellation process. The discovery of cupellation five thousand years ago marks the time at which world lead production began.**
**Perhaps a relationship exists between the production of silver from lead, silver's use in coinage and the growth of Classic Greek culture. Shortly after societies in the Eastern Mediterranean began to use silver coinage (Athens possessed the largest lead-silver deposits known at the time) they were transformed into dominating federations which fostered our present social structures, business interrelationships and ethics.**

The binary relationship between mind and body, non-physical and physical, has been manufactured and re-manufactured throughout the history of Western civilization, notably by the seventeenth century French Philosopher René Descartes. While a discussion of Cartesian dualism may seem abstract and distant from the everyday experience of metalsmiths, it is important to acknowledge that the way that we think about sheet metal, or hammering, or even the things that we make, are all mediated by such abstract and learned beliefs. A dominant segment of American society actively believes in the superiority of the intellectual over that which is associated with the physical: the body, the environment, labor, etceteras. For makers, it is imperative to consider these ideas as they evaluate their work and its role within their complicated society.

**To be plumb is to stand erect.**
**That's what plumb bobs are all about. Lead assisted in the construction of many geometries.**
**The Parthenon stands plumb in part due to lead marking weights.**
**These weights marked erectness and they were also marked:**
**many had Athena's own symbol (the owl) cast into them.**
**Much lead work is marked. Sling bullets were often inscribed with flouts, jibes and jeers.**
**"Hit hard" or "Well Done" were not uncommon texts.**
**The rifling marks on the surface of today's bullets in Detroit or Los Angeles are no less poignant.**

*Sir John Cass*
from
*English Leadwork, Its Art & History.*
L. Weaver, FSA.
London, 1909,
reissued by Benjamin Blom, Inc. NY NY.
1972

That dualist influences are present in our field can be found in the common belief that the idea supersedes the actual object, where the object is always an imitation of the idea, and the often unchallenged assumption that influence or meaning flows only from maker into material. The differences in meaning between the phrases "using/manipulating material" and "working with material" give evidence to such a frequent assumption. The methods by which meaning and content and relationships with physical materials are described, are influenced by culturally inherited beliefs. Discerning the source of those beliefs, and how tastes, desires and intuitions are constructed, we can consciously choose to accept or discard them.

Current aspects of the mind/body question are found in concepts of the "real" and "virtual." The wave of interest in simulated and technologically-mediated experiences, and the tendency to regard these experiences as equivalent or even superior to the "real thing" is evidence that dualist ideologies are still operative. Consider the ways in which people fail to acknowledge the difference between "body-knowledge" and "mind-knowledge" in, for example, learning to raise a bowl with physical, body-involved instruction, and learning to raise a bowl by watching an instructional video. To define knowledge as information that can be digitized or transmitted is to deny the value, the profundity, of physical ways of learning and knowing.

**When Europeans**
**invaded the Americas,**
**the Spaniards**
**exploited silver and**
**lead deposits**
**in Mexico and Peru.**
**The forty thousand tons of silver which the Spaniards transferred from the New World to Europe**
**during the period from about 1550 to 1750 helped to ruin the status of Spain as a major world power through the suppression**
**of local industry by sustained major purchases of foreign goods.**
**However, the introduction of this great mass of Spanish silver into the European economy**
**undoubtedly helped to initiate the Industrial Revolution.**

**Lead is an element.**
**On the periodic table, it is a metal scientifically expressed as Pb.**
**The melting point of lead is 651 degrees Fahrenheit.**

## THE ROLE OF OBJECTS IN CONSTRUCTING THE SELF AND CULTURE

The dynamic between human beings and the objects that surround them is a complex one, and many thinkers throughout history have dealt with this relationship. One theory concerning human development describes developmental growth as a progressive process.[6] In this theory objects play an important role in the construction of one's self-awareness.

At the earliest stages of cognition an individual's self-awareness is predicated on their apprehension of objects which are not a part of them, those things which are "other", "not self." As experiences with objects increase, a person's definition of self and other becomes more complex. The more objects the individual approaches, the more complex their concept of those objects becomes and thus, their definition of self becomes more comprehensive. Objects once perceived as outside are in fact a product of the self's own perception.

At their best, experiences with objects can be viewed as lenses through which individuals can continually increase their own self identity. As the environment is constantly defined and redefined by one's perceptions, we continually remake our own world. Intuition, taste, and inspiration don't come from thin air, but they are informed by past experiences.

**The massive timbers employed in the structuring of roof trusses in medieval cathedrals**
**are in part evidence of the density of the lead supported by those trusses.**
**Roof sheathing, gutters, scuppers and leaders were made of lead.**
**In a fire the trusses provided ample fuel to bring the sheathing to its melting point.**
**Tributaries of lead were directed by the gutters**
**to the scupper spillways and down the leader pipes.**
**The molten lead became all-consuming as it sought the earthly resistance to its gravitational pursuit.**

As with individuals, cultures are defined and redefined by the objects they produce. Every time an artifact enters the culture and every time an idea is transformed into an object, its physicality has resonance. Powerful because they contain not only what the maker injected into them (consciously or not), objects also contain the associative power of the materials, including the social and political histories, and the history of the social relations that particular objects and materials uphold.

**Lead has a specific gravity of 11.36.**
**Specific gravity is the ratio of the weight of a given volume**
**of a substance to that of an equal volume of water.**
**It is a measure of density, and as materials go, lead is a dense material.**
**This is illustrated by the term 'creep.' Lead sheathing on**
**cathedral spires was said to creep due to the severe angle of the spire**
**and the density of the sheathing.**

It is in the transformation from the idea to the physical object, that the input of the maker, the history of the material, the history of the fabrication processes, the context of a given object in the community come together.

^
*Looking Glass*, 1994
Erika Ayala Stefanutti and
Gary S. Griffin
lead, glass, 9 x 6 x 1.5"

**Dilatation, the act of expanding,**
**became a determinate for the form of sheathed roofs.**
**Expansion caused by direct sunlight**
**required that the lead be free to move while remaining**
**attached to its supportive substrate.**

# Remaking Material

Ideologies are powerful because they not only describe the way things are, but suggest the way they ought to be. There is a narrowly focused discussion of material in this field, and this is, in part, governed by ideologies which devalue the physical. Metalsmiths often ignore the fact that material itself has an agency. Current metalsmithing exhibition catalogs, emphasize self-expression and conceptually constructed images. Rarely, if ever, does one find a discussion of how the media supports these claims, nor does one find affirmation that material has instrumentality of any kind.

**Lead occurs naturally adjacent to silver.**

**Galena is the mineral from which lead is extracted.**

**Galena is about 80% lead with the difference primarily being silver, gold and arsenic.**

As we were working on this theme of reinventing material we asked ourselves: "what methods could one use to describe material, and what are the sources of those methods? Why is it that, generally, discussion of media is limited to its physical characteristics and aesthetic formal properties? Why is there no study or examination of the ways in which materials operate as meaning in the objects our field produces?"

**Benvenuto Cellini, the great Italian Renaissance goldsmith, recommended the use of lead for proofs in casting since lead casts with delicate accuracy. In silversmithing work, lead is recommended as a supportive backing for chasing repoussé as well as an aid in tube-bending. But lead is also the most sinister of contaminants in the silver shop. Even a small trace of lead on the surface of a piece of silver will eat away the silver when it is brought to annealing temperature.**

In an expanded paradigm, in which meaning can be perceived as springing from the object, makers may find that the making of meaning is not dependent solely on the producer's volition, but that material and physicality also contribute.

**Plumbum is the Latin word for lead.**
**To plumb is to work lead.**
**The Plumbers Company was founded in England in 1365 although the English had worked lead since the Roman times.**
**During the Middle Ages, plumbers applied roof sheathing, made gutters, scuppers, piping, cisterns, gargoyles and statuary.**
**In England, lead statuary became a symbol of nationalism when compared to Italian bronze.**
**The lead mines of Wales endured until the people consumed all their forests to fire their smelting furnaces.**

In this age of the information highway and of non-material (conceptual) work, makers, particularly craftspeople, can recognize the profundity of producing objects as a confluence between maker and material.

**A cistern is a collection and distribution center for water. Rain is collected from roof watershed through the gutters and lead pipes to be stored in cisterns for subsequent use.**
**English plumbers made cisterns out of lead and it was not until the early nineteenth century that a crusade developed to eliminate them. Most were melted.**
**Perhaps batteries are like cisterns.**

**Lead has excellent workability without hardening.**
**It has become the supportive glazing for windows.**
**It is corrosion resistant above and below ground.**
**St. Dunstan, the patron saint of metal workers, is buried in a lead coffin in Canterbury. Lead has high anti-friction properties. Many of the bearing surfaces in your car's motor are lead. Lead is useful in shielding radioactive matter. Think of your most recent visit to the dentist's office.**
**You were covered with a lead blanket while X-rays were taken.**

**The amount of lead used today is significantly greater than the amount of lead mined.**

**Lead is recycled.**

**The highest use of lead today is in the manufacture of lead acid storage batteries. Perhaps those batteries contain the residue of a Roman water pipe or wine cup.**

Throughout our working process, we reviewed metalsmiths' descriptions of their objects. This review raised several questions. If we look for meaning in the maker's intentions, where is the idea located? Is it in the object or is it located in the writing that accompanies it or both? And, most importantly, what happens to a field that makes *things* and then only speaks of the *idea* of the things? If metalsmiths limit their discussions to the nature of ideas the specific, physical and material characteristics of their objects become invisible.

**The ancients ascribed genders to materials in order to guarantee success in alloying.**

**In some cases, gender was a matter of color. In others, it was determined by whether the material was found on or below the surface of the earth. Lead continues to be genderized today.**

Cartesian dualism made a very significant point: What one imagines or conceives of is different from that which one makes. Ideas and things are not the same, they exist and function in distinct, discernible ways and while the difference between thing and idea may be clear to producers, the language used to describe objects seldom addresses either the distinctions between, or the codependency of the physical and the non-physical. When makers choose to adapt their critical paradigm to include an affirmation of the usefulness and meanings found in the physical, they make it possible to more clearly name and appreciate all of the different elements (narrative content, material, physical) which contribute to the significance of their objects. In so doing, they make available to themselves an expanded, more complex method of evaluating their work.

**In the Metal Men comics, lead is male.**

# Past Lives

Often when makers acquire their material, they assume it to be a blank slate, without a past life, memory, or recollection; through their work, they will project meaning onto the substance, unable or perhaps unwilling to see meaning as a dynamic between their labors and the meanings/history/resonance of the material. What are the ideologies that allow makers to see some materials as blank, awaiting the dynamic of the maker's hand, and others such as "found" or "alternative" materials as having rich, usable histories?

Of course there is no such a thing as a not-found or neutral material. As a war medal has a rich history that contributes to the significance and value of an object it becomes a part of, so does sheet metal. The difference in the meaningful value of these media resides not in the materials themselves but in metalsmiths' ability and willingness to perceive and articulate it. Each maker's belief system determines whether or not they recognize that all materials have "memory", and a past and present life.

Study of the histories of materials is critical to the maker's individual growth, and the growth of this field. Without scholarship even alternative materials are subject to the same limited degree of interrogation as those materials labeled neutral. When one considers the inexhaustible amount of information available for any single material, the ignorance in an assumption that any material is dry or devoid of considerable meaning, becomes evident.

Methodologies in both theory and practice which promote only superficial understandings of material, of objects, and of physicality, are actively destructive to metalsmithing. In order for the field to grow and develop, it is crucial that we rigorously examine the beliefs we have inherited and then judiciously name them as valid or invalid. It is essential that metalsmiths end the blind acceptance of ideas that may not be appropriate or useful in critiquing the objects that we make.

As we engage in a continuous process of remaking and reconstructing ourselves and our world we position ourselves to achieve greater self-realization. When makers revise the questions they ask of the objects they make, they redefine that which they consider essential in those objects. Finally to increase our ability and desire to perceive meaning in objects, as makers we can enhance our capacity to recognize the relevance of making.

## Notes

1 Ken Ames, *Death in the Dining Room*, 1992.

2 From *Webster's Concise Dictionary of Modern English*: study (studi') vi. 1. be engaged in learning 2. make study of 3. try constantly to do 4. consider 5. scrutinize 6. effort to acquire knowledge

3 Elizabeth Minnich, *Transforming Knowledge*

4 Ibid.

5 Throughout this paper we will make reference to "culture" or "dominant culture." Our usage of these words does not imply a belief in a monolithic, homogenous understanding of culture. On the contrary, we are conceptually aligned with contemporary philosopher, Elizabeth Minnich, who states that in this country, there are many cultures. We borrow her phrase "dominant culture" to refer to that segment which is most powerful, most visible and most defining. (TK pp. 4 – 5)

6 For more information on Hegel's theory of human development, see Miller, *Material Culture and Mass Consumption*. 1987.

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Erika Ayala Stefanutti is a metalsmith working in West Bloomfield, Michigan.

Gary S. Griffin is a practicing metalsmith and is currently Artist-in-Residence and Head of the Metalsmithing Department at Cranbrook Academy of Art, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan.


< *Scupper at Windsor Castle* from *English Leadwork, Its Art & History*. L. Weaver, FSA. London, 1909, reissued by Benjamin Blom, Inc. NY NY. 1972

# Reviews

Mary Catherine Knight
*Bowl*, c. 1903
silver, enamel, 1 15/16 x 4 1/4"
Photograph courtesy:
The Cleveland Museum of Art,
John L. Severance Fund

## The Ideal Home: 1900 - 1920

American Craft Museum
New York, New York
October 21, 1993 - February 15, 1994

By Matthew Kangas

American Craft Museum director Janet Kardon has her work cut out for her: a decade-long effort to create *The History of Twentieth-Century American Craft.* After a series of symposia introducing the topic, the first in a projected series of eight annual exhibitions, *The Ideal Home 1900 - 1920* opened late last year. Kardon concedes three previous exhibitions on American Arts and Crafts (Princeton, Boston, Los Angeles) antedated hers, (she left out a fourth, The Oakland Museum's recent survey of California Arts and Crafts, *Living the Good Life.*) Compared to all those exhibitions, *The Ideal Home 1900 - 1920* is smaller but measures up well.

First of all, two major contributions to the scholarship of the period in the accompanying 304 -page catalog, Arizona State University professor Beverly K. Brandt's essay, "The Critic and the Evolution of Early Twentieth-Century American Craft," and "Metalsmithing and Jewelrymaking 1900 - 1920" by W. Scott Braznell, a former American Silver Museum curator are worthy of note.

Brandt's essay defends the early artist-critics such as ceramist Charles Fergus Binns who sagely counseled "to destroy that which is below standard and to exercise self-denial to resist temptation to sell an unworthy product." More astutely, A. Clutton-Brock noted in 1920 that: "The question to be asked about the critic is not whether he is an amateur as an artist but whether he is an amateur as a critic."

Brandt further draws the sharp contrast between today's often theory-ridden critics and those early in the century who: "sought within their own discipline the same refinement of expression that they hoped to instill within the crafts."

In an unusual turnabout, one art critic, Frederick W. Coburn, complained about the St. Louis World's Fair metal show jurors being *too* restrictive in excluding work "of exuberance and jollity of design."

Braznell's essay complements the objects Kardon and former senior curator John Perreault selected for the show. He points out how metalworking was used as an activity for political reform and a raising up of the lower classes. Indeed, training often took place right on the factory floor. Early corporate professors were Joseph Aranyi (Tiffany), William Codman and Charles Hansen (Gorham).

At the other end of the economic spectrum, wealthy women like Frances Glessner studied with Madeline Wynne, and Laurin Martin taught Elizabeth Copeland and Mildred Watkins. With amateur magazines, summer school workshops, elementary school training, and World War I disabled veteran instruction, Arts and Crafts metals caught on nationwide. In *The Ideal Home 1900 - 1920*, women who made significant early contributions are recognized. Jane Carson Barron and Frances Barnum Smith's cross necklace (1904) outdoes Robert Ebendorf's recent fashionable efforts. Copeland's 1914 enamel box revives Celtic illumination and Jessie Preston's bronze jewelry box (1904) also accentuates curving arabesque forms more akin to Art Nouveau than Arts and Crafts. A 1903 silver-and-enamel bowl by Mary Catherine Knight has the decoration on the interior of the bowl only. And, compared to Samuel Yellin's 1918 *Gothic Chest* of wrought iron, a 1920 bronze-and-crystal candelabra by Marie Zimmerman is equally strong and powerfully constructed.

Others, however, far from their native lands, also made major contributions in the United States: Karl Leinonen (Finland), Arthur Stone (England), Carl Schon (Germany), Julius Randahl (Sweden), Kristopher Haga (Norway), and Yellin (Russia). The point is, American Arts and Crafts was truly international in its origins, as well as intricately dependent upon women at every level. American craft today is exactly the same in the latter sense with, if anything, more control, cultural administration, sales, and production by women.

The highlights of Kardon's exhibition blend late Art Nouveau, Arts and Crafts, and, significantly, proto-modern styles to give a broader picture of the period than have prior exhibitions. This reinforces the rich, diverse and non-monolithic range of artistic expressions the period contained. From Leinonen's smooth un-ornamented sterling bowl and spoon, or George Blanchard's equally plain 1904 silver bowl, to the George Washington Maher 1912 coffee and tea service with its elaborately hand wrought *japonoiserie,* early twentieth century metals in the U.S. sparkled amidst the mostly dark and gloomy ceramics, furniture, and textiles.

We are left contemplating a heyday of achievement for American metal arts but with the nagging question of how much credit critics of the day deserve for the flowering. At the very least, it looks like more was written then than today.

In our current zeal for serious commentary instead of just promotion and publicity, we must allow for tolerance of coexisting styles, an openness for new expressions, and (learning from the first two decades of this century,) an atmosphere that does not see high moral purpose as a guarantee of superior esthetic quality. As they did at the turn of the century, politics and esthetics must, today, allow for the idiosyncrasies of the individual artist rather than conspiring together to squelch freedom of expression in the name of one high ideal over another.

The next two exhibitions in the series *The History of Twentieth-Century American Craft* will be *Within Our Shores: Affirming Cultural Identities* and *Craft in the Machine Age: European and American Modernism.* They will cover the years 1920 - 1945.

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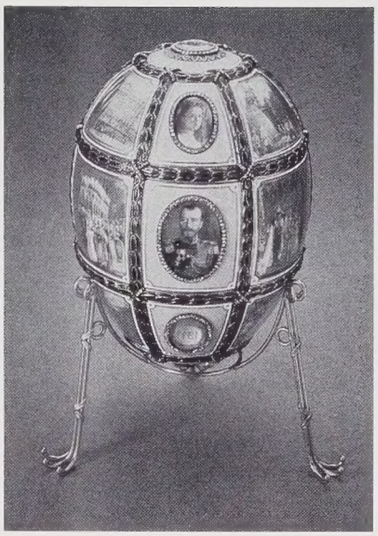
*Matthew Kangas, a former Renwick Fellow in American Crafts, is a Seattle based art critic and curator who is a frequent contributor to* Metalsmith *and other magazines.*

LEFT TO RIGHT

*Easter Egg,* 1908 – 1917
enamel, 2⅛" h.

*Large Kovsch,* 1899 – 1908
gilded silver, cloisonné enamel,
amethysts, 6¼" l.

Photographs courtesy
of Musée des Arts décoratifs, Paris, France



## Fabergé, Orfèvre des Tsars

Musée des arts décoratifs, Paris
September 24, 1993 – January 2, 1994

by Anne McPherson

One of the rewards of *glasnost* is the beginning of artistic exchanges between East and West. The pleasure of discovering what others have been enjoying for years is one aspect of it; more exciting still is the opening up of Russian storehouses whose contents have been hidden for decades. This incredible exhibition of objects from the Fabergé workshops satisfies in both respects. Over 350 precious objects, some of them priceless, have been conveyed first to The Hermitage, second to Paris, and finally to the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. One can only guess at the overwhelming task of assembling such objects from private and public collections around the world – such diplomacy, such assurances of safety and safe return that must have been required.

At a time when Russia shows itself willing to open the history books to the twentieth-century story, the presentation of the Fabergé opus is most appropriate. The name symbolizes the finest Russian decorative art of the late Romanov period. The artist's 'reign' coincides with that of the last royal family: all his customers came from their line and with their deaths his business was done. This exhibition gives an opportunity to understand why Carl Fabergé achieved such imperial favour.

Stylistically Fabergé was not a great innovator. In a period when Paris was leading a Rococo and later a Louis XVI revival, he went along, designing with a rather heavy hand in the Rococo vein, yet producing neo-Classical pieces much more delicate than the originals they imitated, as in the numerous cigarette cases, dance programs and picture frames often commissioned as gifts by the royal family. The examples shown here of his Art Nouveau ventures are mostly stolid and unimaginative, as poorly conceived as the Doulton and Galle vases for which he contrived the mounts. More original, though not particularly tasteful to this late-twentieth century eye, are the works designed in his Moscow workshop in the neo-Russian style. Using ancient Russian motifs, he produced hollow ware with broadly outlined angular and curvilinear designs, and single coloured opaque enamels. Miniatures of paintings by Russian artists appear on some of the boxes in this style. There are some magnificent pieces among them, such as the traditional Russian ceremonial cup known as a *kovsh,* with its delicate cloisonné work combining both neo-Russian and Art Nouveau designs, embellished with shaded enamels.

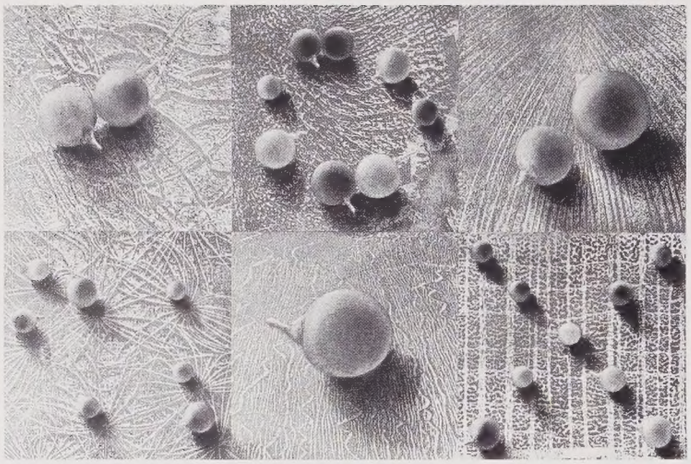
The massive neo-Russian style did well in Moscow with the bourgeoisie, but not in St. Petersburg, where the court doted on lighter confections. Here Faberge did develop one fabulous idea – the Easter egg. The first was commissioned by Alexander III in 1895 as a gift for the Tsarina. Eggs were given annually by the Tsar and Tsarevitch until 1917 - 54 were made in all. The imperial order was that no design could be repeated; it was also understood that each egg should contain a "surprise," usually hidden inside.

The designs aside, what makes these eggs fabulous is the skill of their construction. According to the scholars writing in the catalogue (the eye could be fooled, looking through a vitrine), the works are virtually seamless. Faberge used metal pins instead of welding to attach external decoration; he backed the areas to be enameled with an additional fine sheet of silver; and the cage-work for the eggs was done in three sections – two ovals, and individual straight pieces for the middle, as exemplified in the Fifteenth Anniversary Egg. The delicate patterning of the enamel was achieved by the *guilloche* technique (finely engraving the silver or gold eggshells before enameling), and by using layers of different coloured translucent and opaque enamels, giving the effect of mother-of-pearl or moiré fabric (a cigarette case shows this clearly).

Then there are the surprises, miniatures tucked inside the eggs, some of which operate by a tiny mechanism, others simply well articulated with moving parts, such as the gold coronation coach that rolls along with a realistic swinging motion.

Finally, what makes the eggs fabulous are the quantities of gems, always kept subservient to the overall design of the work, rather than boldly advertising themselves. It is in these great works that Fabergé shows how well he deserves his reputation as one of the world's greatest makers of *objets de vertu.*

*Anne MacPherson is a journalist who resides in Elora, Ontario Canada.*



Peggy Hitchcock
*Random OX*, 1992
enamel, copper foil, ink, oil
17½ x 25½"

## Enamelrama: A National Invitational Exhibiton of Contemporary Enameling

The University of West Florida Art Gallery
Center for Fine and Performing Arts
Pensacola, Florida
September 14 – October 16, 1993

by Allen Peterson

It has been the nature of artistic experimentation in the twentieth century to break boundaries, expand the use of materials and reinvent the limits of traditional forms. Artists also have had the freedom to explore any historic style or technique. This very diversity has imbued all the arts with a vibrancy of invention and technical expertise that is one of the characterisitcs of our era. It should not be suprising then to see the same spirit manifest itself in the smaller arts of jewelry and metals. Should not be, perhaps, but is. *Enamelrama,* an invitaitional exhibiton curated by metalsmith James Carter for the art gallery at the University of West Florida, in Pensacola, is a revealing cross-section of some of the currents in contemporary metalsmithing in which enameling is a major factor. Twelve artists, including the curator, show a range of classy and glassy interests that run from the fairly traditional to the strongly sculptural, from the vessel to the metal canvas. In short, the new history of enameling.

Echoes of traditional history appear in the wearable sterling and cloisonné work of Merry-Lee Rae and Gael and Howard Silverblatt, not just in the forms of necklace, bracelet, and earrings, etceteras, but in the masterly attention to details of craft, and in the illustrative use of cloisonné. In the work of the Silverblatts, for example, those attentions include the obsessively tiny, magical narratives that cover the fronts and the backs of pieces; enamels in the service of depictions with bracelet sections becoming almost successive pages. John Paul Miller, a long-time master of jewelry and enamels, also displays the fascination of the traditionally minuscule in his delicately abstracted cuttlefish necklace, a kind of abstraction that places Miller's work with the concerns of mid-century when imagery was seeking a comfortable place between the old and new formalisms, between natural and abstract. Carter himself refers in his pins to the history of the fibula, happily and handsomely updated. In switching from silver to gold, he has added a final richness to well-considered sculptural forms that set off his brilliant enamels. In the area of the vessel form, Harlan Butt's work goes from the traditional to the more challenging and very satisfying fruit-like closed forms in which the enamel surfaces and beautifully-sculpted forms really meet in that fusion required of form and content. However, it is June Schwarcz that most effectively brings energetic new life to both the vessel form and the basse taille technique.

In the work of several other artists, traditions are modified in scale and imagery so much that enamel becomes another tool, not always recognizable as glass, and not very distinct from painting or sculpture. In these works, we are fully in the late 20th century and at the place where new life occurs. Rebeka Laskin is one who has subsumed the properties of painting/sculptural relief in the brooch. Her small wearable paintings would not lose impact if we were pin-sized and they enormous. Their muted and textured surfaces have the feel of weathered rock and natural process tempered by a reductive formal interest.

At the far end of enamel as painting is the work of Alison Howard-Levy. In these pieces the fact of enamel, or paint, or relative size, no longer matters. They have the image concerns of the late modern and all of their impact is directed at the nature of the expressive object, divorced from use, from the more trivial concerns of beauty, and from standard criticism. This is an artist who had chosen to work small, but keep intimacy at large. At the far end of scale is James Malenda whose wall-sized sculptures are selective blow-ups of basic metalsmith construction techniques: barrels, hollow-form, filing, sand-blasting, as well as enamel. The issue is size and a full appreciation of the often lost details of form, color, and surfaces. He reminds us that not all things small can be enlarged, but his sense of appropriate relationships makes these memorable. The ironic fact is that these same pieces would not be as effective at usual jewelry sizes.

The boundaries of two and three-dimensional illusion, seriality, and combined media are found in the pictorial work of Peggy Hitchcock whose flat, rich surfaces of enamel and copper foil are enhanced by air brushed beads that are illusionistically three-dimensional. Echoes of the mechanistic in the bracelets and pins of Kenneth Rockwell are underscored by titles such as *Primary Clamp* and *Fin.* His rather bizarre fabrications often have the look of functional details from valves, gratings, and pre-electronic devices. It is a look that is inventive and eclectic with a sense of humor in the formal combinations that would not be out of place in the movie *Brazil.* Though some have the look of a stylistic forced-fit, overall they have a quirky beauty. Susan Willis show two styles of work, pins that remind one of small-shaped paintings, assembled together, and sculpturally iconic constructions with an Imari, or at least, highly oriental, high culture inflection. They stand in their boxes like a Shogun's sculptural ornaments.

Invitational exhibitions usually have a point of view: as surveys, introductions, and/or showcases. To some degree, all those goals are contained in this modest-sized, but revealing, exhibition. All the techniques are here (save plique a jour), but the show's real message is about how something that often used to be considered just as jewelry, has grown to include itself in the other proficient and expressive arts of this century, not lesser but more.

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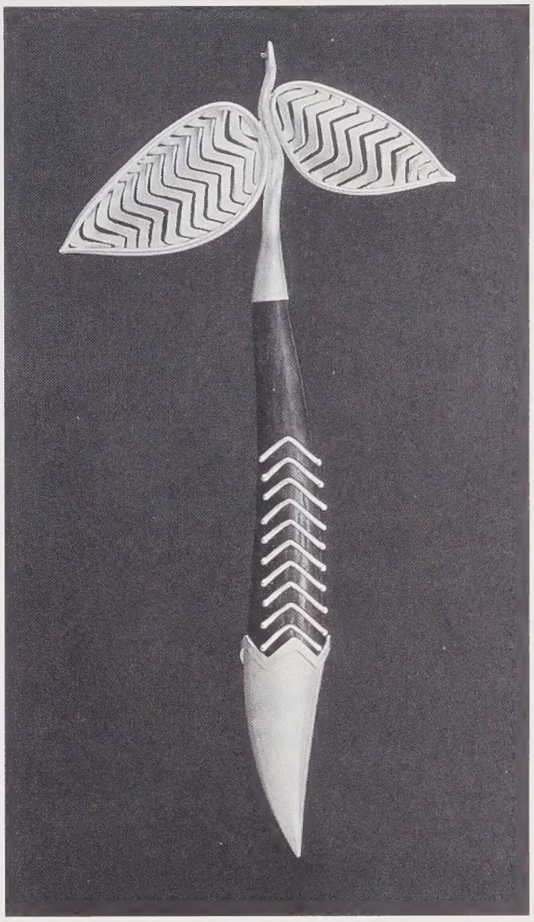
*Allan Peterson is chairman of the Art Department at Pensacola Junior College, Florida, director of the Visual Arts Gallery, and an artist/writer who recieved a 1992 NEA Fellowship in Poetry.*

LEFT TO RIGHT

Susan Ewing
*Ex Votos to St. Eligius Series: Blade Bracelet VII,* 1993
sterling silver, 4 x 4½ x 1"
Photo: Rick Potteiger

Vicki Sedman
*Brooch,* 1993
silver, antler, 9 x 3½ x 1½"



## Poetic Objects: Contemporary American Jewelry

Images Friedman Gallery,
Louisville, KY
November 6, 1993 – February 13, 1994

by Lorrie Blair

In glass cases sealed from human contact, jewelry, like any cultural artifact detached from its daily function, becomes an object for contemplation. But jewelry is intended to be worn and how it interacts with the wearer is an essential part of the reflection. *Poetic Objects,* an exhibition of contemporary jewelry by 14 artists, curated by Elizabeth Scheurer, offers much for the viewer to consider.

While all pieces in the exhibition have the potential to be worn, Linda Threadgill provides other options. Her work, when not worn, serves the dual function as miniature wall pieces. In one, a two inch sterling silver pin in the shape of an urn teeters precariously on the edge of a thin copper platform. The pin's surface is etched with a pattern similar to embossed wall paper. Spiraling, art nouveau leaves emerge from the vase. Both pin and base are framed in wood and the entire piece is about twelve inches high.

In contrast, Susan Ewing's work encompasses its wearer physically and conceptually. *Ex Votos to St. Eligius,* which pay homage to the patron saint of metalsmiths, is unlike traditional holy medallions. *Bandsaw Brooch* is made of a round, smooth spool wrapped with a razor thin saw blade. The blade tapers downward like the dangerous point of a broken blade. Another chilling piece, *Blade Bracelet,* is made of two small circular saw blades that when worn, envelop the wrist. The blades go in opposite directions, recalling ocean waves or a ring of fire. When worn, a third blade, not quite horizontal, gives the illusion of slicing through the wrist like the illusion of a magician sawing a person in half.

Works by Beverly Penn and Vickie Sedman allude to the idea that in American society most jewelry is worn by women. Penn's *Venus Series,* consisting of five brooches from her on-going work, *Art to Wear - Objects of Adornment,* depict female imagery from well known paintings and sculpture in art history, such as *Standing Nike,* the *Venus of Willendorf,* and *Aphrodite.* The silhouette of the figures are cut from silver, then repeated in black to create somewhat of a shadow. Their surfaces are etched with a lacy or snakeskin pattern. The figures are bordered by thin, gold frames. They are small, delicate, easy. However, they carry with them the heavy baggage of gender roles and the objectification of women by male artists.

In comparison to those made by Penn, Sedman's works are visually more daring, more demanding. Five large untitled brooches made from sterling silver and deer antler resemble small swords or penises. The silver portion seems massive next to the elegant lines delicately carved like ivory scrimshaw onto antler. One particularly phallic piece, displayed in an erect position, is eight inches long. Its base and head are made from silver, while the shaft is made from clear acrylic. The entire piece is embellished with a snail-like motif raised about one fourth inch. Sedman's work is at once threatening and alluring.

Whether pondering Venuses or penises, it is interesting to consider how our perceptions of jewelry depend largely on the wearer's gender. If a man wears Penn's brooches, does he buy into the male gaze or female ownership? And what if a woman wears the brooch with the intent to adorn herself for a man? Certainly the impressions of Sedman's work can change if they worn by a man instead of a woman. Consider too how the meaning can change as to where and how the pieces are worn.

Jewelry has an identification with its wearer and through jewelry the wearer adopts a persona. *Poetic Objects,* with its a wide range from the traditional to the avant garde, offers something for everyone.

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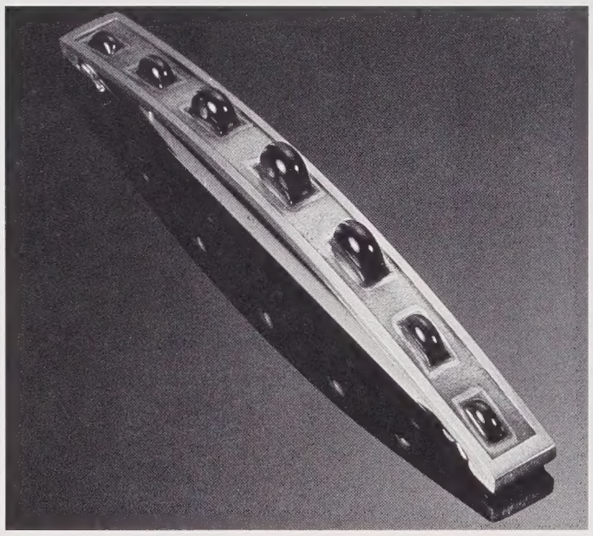
*Lorrie Blair is an art critic living in Northern Kentucky.*

LEFT TO RIGHT

*Brooch,* 1994
silver, 18k, 24k
5¼ x ½ x 1"

*Brooch,* 1994
glass, silver, 23k, 24k
2 x 2 x ½"

Photographs:
Baiada Photography



## Julie Anne Mihalisin: Luminous Renderings, New Jewelry

Heller Gallery
New York, New York
March 5 – 27, 1994

by Karen Chambers

Whenever I hear of a "fine art" critic poaching in my territory, contemporary glass sculpture, I become annoyed, if not outraged. After all I've spent a lot of time learning about this area and I'm offended by the naïveté that infuses their reviews. They may be enthusiastic about objects, but mistake for creativity that which is only the result of technical virtuosity. I get equally angry when they praise ineptitude as fighting against the tyranny of technique. Shouldn't I respect the boundaries within the craft world? Am I encroaching on someone else's turf? How can I presume to write about jewelry? Since Julie Anne Mihalisin's jewelry is glass and metal, maybe I'm not trespassing, just expanding my horizon. But jewelry does deal with issues that I don't usually address: wearability, ornament as symbol, a specific history. There are overlaps, too: suitability of material, craftsmanship, design. The essential reason I wanted to write about this work was its visual impact – the core issue in all the visual arts regardless of how we categorize them.

Mihalisin's necklaces, pendants, and brooches are sensuous baubles. They are seductive. They appeal to me as a wearer of jewelry. Before the gallery assistant opened the case and took them out, I imagined fingering them with their smooth bulges of clear and opalescent glass. That tactility, often noted as a quality that may be more specific to objects/sculpture made of the traditional craft materials than the fine arts, was communicated through cocoon shapes, bubbles, ovals of glass squeezing through tiny wires of gold or silver. She uses those metals in a very straightforward manner, twisting and tying the wires into meticulous knots, elegant in their simplicity. It is a nonprecious handling of precious material.

Glass, despite its appearance, is a common material – just sand at its most basic. But glass has always been used to simulate the precious. I think of all those medieval reliquaries and manuscript covers studded with the real and the ersatz. Mihalisin's works, with her bold forms, evoke that heritage, too. They also recall Celtic and Norse jewelry – brooches, clasps, belt buckles. And I'm reminded of another jeweler who was a wizard at combining metal and glass – René Lalique. They even share a taste for the natural; Mihalisin's is more abstract, but no less organic. I like thinking of her as a continuation of the glass-and-metal jewelry tradition.

But Mihalisin's work is also clearly contemporary with a Post-Minimalist stance. It would be easy to see her set of three brooches of amber-colored glass and silver as miniature Donald Judd progressions gone flaccid as the glass oozes between the metal supports. The return to the handmade, the traditional province of the crafts, from Minimalism's industrial fabrication while retaining Minimalism's geometry marks this work as a "post" development.

Mihalisin's pieces also evoke Process Art. I always mention Lynda Benglis's latex pours of the 1970s when I discuss Mary Shaffer's plate-glass-slumped-through-wire sculptures of slightly later. Both arrested the process of art in the making and declared that moment the art. Shaffer pioneered precisely the technique that Mihalisin uses, but Shaffer's results appear less controlled, more a record of the piece's forming outside the control of the artist. In reality both Shaffer and Mihalisin stop the process exactly where they want it, exactly when the result suits them aesthetically. In their respective kilns, they lower the temperature when the glass has melted to the point they want, thereby permanently capturing that moment.

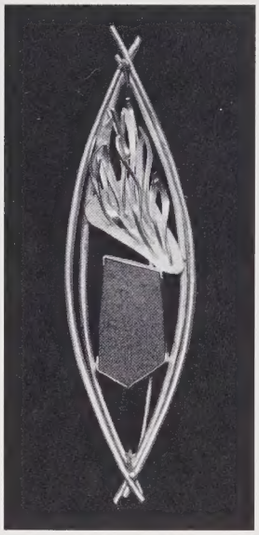
I'm not tempted to discuss Mihalisin's work as small sculpture despite these congruences with other sculptors' art. The handling of the material, the scale, the organic design, the physical lightness, the sensuous feel of metal caressing my throat when I try on a necklace, all tell me that this is jewelry to be handled and handed down. I like that this is work that is unpretentious in intent and exists just for what it is – beautiful jewelry. It affirms my conviction that the best work being done today is by artists who care about their materials and that fulfilling function is a worthy goal. Mihalisin achieves that. That makes her a very fine artist in my book.

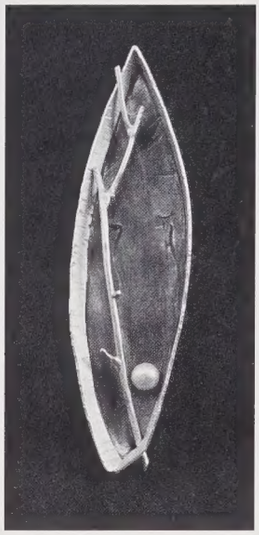
*Karen Chambers is a frequent writer on glass who resides in New York, NY.*

LEFT TO RIGHT

*Boat in Slow Current,* 1993
sterling, lapis, fused and fabricated
4½ x 1½ x ½"

*Crossing Over,* 1993
pewter, pearl, sterling
4 x 1½ x ¼"





## Crossing Back: New Work by Paulette J. Werger

Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters
Madison, Wisconsin
September 1 – 30, 1993

by Katherine Rogers

With a stirring of reeds at the edge of a pond, or the gathering of a handful of pine needles, Paulette Werger catches pieces of forest peace and gentle movment in her *Crossing Back* exhibition. Her images evoke a mood of meditation and reverence for the ordinary moment, the quiet change, the extraordinary in the everyday. Wearable as jewelry, this collection of brooches, bracelets, and necklaces also succeeds, in descriptive and metaphoric terms, as sensitive, even painterly, sculpture. These sculptures, of course, can be held in the hand.

During an initial survey of the show, Werger's *Crossing Over Brooch* immediately captured my eye and plucked at my heartstrings. It turned out, the artist later told me, that this was the first piece she had created following the sudden and unexpected death of her father. Touching in its evidence of the artist's hand, *Crossing Over* speaks eloquently of bittersweet transition. Werger has combined sterling and pewter in the fused and fabricated image of a boat encasing a tree branch and a pearl.

Richly imbued with layers of meaning, the boat, with its oarlike branch, alludes to Native American canoes, Viking boats and burial ceromonies, as well as the soul's journey with Charon – the figure in Greek mythology who ferries departed souls across the river Styx. The pearl, sinking slowly inside the canoe, glimmers softly, like a teardrop.

Completing the pair of brooches, *Crossing Back* offers an elegant metaphor for the process of healing from loss. Waving blades of sterling and gold, like tall grass in water, or a comet's tail, extend from the pearl, up through the invisible-bottom boat. The boat's stern, touching the pearl, also seperates it from the movement inside.

While works like these draw from the artist's own emotional life, the writings of authors such as William Butler Yeats, Gary Synder, and N. Scott Momaday also nourish her inspiration. Often, too, Werger's designs seem gleaned from the sketchbook of a lover of the outdoors, a close observer of the natural world. Such journals, for Werger, might include memories of fishing trips with her father in the Catskill mountains, hikes in the Adirondack or Wisconsin woods, a bike trip through Wales.

Werger's *Boat in Slow Current Brooch* suggests a glide through clean water on a clear warm day. *Water's Edge Brooch,* a favorite of mine, clebrates the musical notion of water. Here a shiny swirl of gold dances with blades of sivler grass over a polished edge of deep lapis blue.

Then again, a pocketful of stones or sticks from some special place might further stir the artist's imagination. Works such as *Organic Impressions Brooch* and *Arboreal Floor #3 Brooch,* incorporating sterling and pewter with found materials, have become badges of botanical reverence. Pieces of Welsh slate and fossilized palm wood hover over slumped pewter twigs and needles that emerge and fade softly upon the darkened forest floor. The linear pewter patterns suggest, as well, the fall of tears or raindrops from metaphoric or figurative clouds above.

Werger's Ashante cast works also pay homage to the African and Native American traditions that have deeply influenced her. Werger, who teaches the lost wax Ashante casting process in workshops around the country, studied the 16th century West African technique with Max and Ruth Frölich. For her, she has said, Ashante casting has assumed personal as well as historical significance. Direct hand work, with a sense of connection to community and the elements, is inherent in the Ashante tradition.

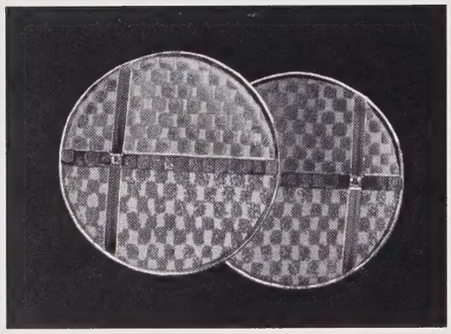
Utilizing fabricating and Ashante cast processes with sterling and gold or fossil in her *Open Hull* and *Moment in Time* necklaces, Werger acknowledges such connection and continuity – to nature, the seasons, and the life cycles. Here, too, the touch of the hand is richly present – not only in the texture and construction of the leaf-shaped boats, but also in the feeling of an invisible cradling of something dear. Werger's skeletal open-hulled boats embrace the air, rib-like, sieve-like – quietly opening to the inhale and the exhale – the passage of spirit.

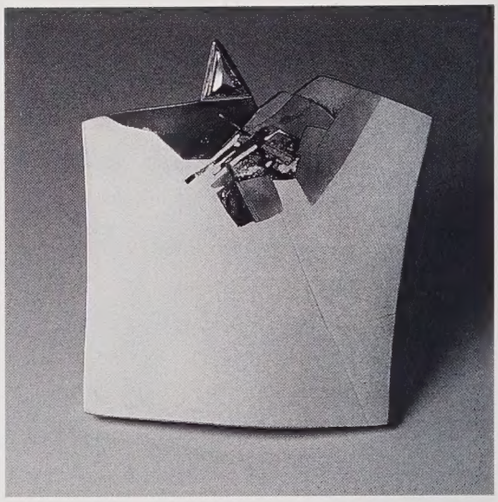
*Katherine Rogers is a painter and free-lance writer who currently resides in Madison, Wisconsin.*

LEFT TO RIGHT

Michael Zobel
*Earrings*
silver, 18k, platinum, rough cut
and polished diamond
Photograph by Fred Thomas

Isolde Baumhackl-Oswald
*Brooch*
fine silver, sterling silver,
copper 24k yellow gold,
palladium, tourmaline





## Artium's 4th Anniversary: An Exhibition of 3 Master Jewelers

Artium Gallery
New York, New York
November 17, 1993 – January 7, 1994

by Lynn Brunelle

The focus of Artium Gallery's fourth anniversary show was on works by Michael Zobel, Isolde Baumhackl-Oswald, and Anthony Lent – three artists with distinctive approaches to metal and adornment. When displayed in such close proximity, the works drew attention to the way each artist uniquely responds to contrast: rough versus polished, straight-edged versus fluid, jewelry as jewelry or as painting, whimsy versus seriousness.

The show was displayed dramatically in three, wall-hung, shadow-box cases. The boxes, draped in rich black backdrop, were lit from inside. These mini-stages presented three separate viewpoints, as a sort of trio of one-acts in a festival of contrast.

The first stage presented the works of Michael Zobel of Germany. Zobel's works show a world of geometry, geology, and architecture. The allure of these pieces is in their vigorous surfaces and concise forms. The most striking evidence of this is the interplay between the geometric and the organic. One remarkable pair of earrings fabricated into checkerboard-like images of married metals is set with uncut and polished diamonds. Zobel displays an adroit balance in his treatment of the metal, as well as his use of the stones. He creates a dazzling tension with alternating squares of rough-textured platinum and 18k yellow gold – some polished, some not – and a row of rough-cut diamonds still in their original form, with one diamond flawlessly polished and set in a bezel of gold.

Zobel's interest in architectural materials is apparent. The natural materials were manipulated to look like concrete, steel, and glass. It is the relationship between the rough crystal and refined metals, along with the geometric shapes yoked together with the more traditional polished diamond, that makes Zobel's work so remarkable.

The work of German-born Isolde Baumhackl-Oswald made a dramatic focus in the next case. Tiny wearable sterling canvases held thin sheet-shards of bright patinas and textures to create bold, breathtaking, painterly brooches and earrings. Using rolling mill textures and fusing thin bits of other metals, she creates landscapes of rich beauty. But these paintings break free from a two-dimensional world with their twisted frames and jutting gemstones.

The metal's colors and textures burst against each other. Baumhackl-Oswald's main contrasts are in the tension created by the spontaneity of the bold soft-sharp, landscape-like brush strokes of color and the soft-sharp refined, delicately set gemstones that seem to gently erupt from the chaos. The set stones anchor the spontaneity of these pieces and illustrate the conscious fabrication and the understanding of the materials employed by the artist.

The third and final case was dedicated to the work of American goldsmith, Anthony Lent, whose pieces explore the real and the surreal. On first glance these works appear to be straightforward, gem-encrusted, beautifully crafted pieces of jewelry. Only upon closer examination do they whisper of a world all their own: a world where golden seahorses with ruby eyes blow bubbles made of pearls and diamonds. Diamond rings become a pair of hands that, while holding the diamond, are actually wearing rings with stones of their own. Snakes, suns, stars, sea creatures, and joyfully mysterious hands and faces, hammered out of gold, create a secret dialogue among themselves.

What is also remarkable about Anthony Lent's work are the secret gifts he gives the wearer of his jewelry. Not only is the wearer privy to a wonderful, whimsical world on the visible exterior, but, he or she is also part of a clandestine conversation going on behind the scenes. Each piece has something which only the wearer can see. Findings are actually tiny hands that grasp the ends of pins, lizards have crawled behind brooches, and sunny faces appear on the backs of earrings. If diamonds are set on the outside of a bracelet, the inside is fabricated so that wearers will have a starry landscape all to themselves. These pieces are a feast for the eyes and imagination. Traditional precious gems and high-carat gold, combined with Lent's astonishing reverence for detail allows the wearer to see a magical world unfold under his or her own nose. What fun!

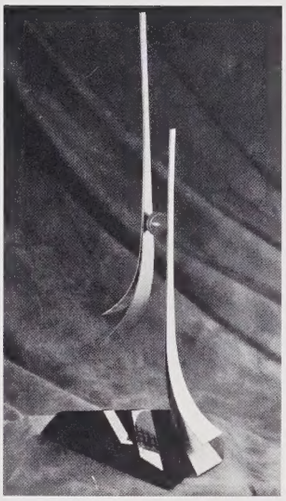
As I left the gallery, the curtain fell on each of the stages: three unique acts that made up a wonderful pageant of contrast. Each artist possesses a mastery of technique, as the title of the show indicated, but the real wonder of these pieces is the different voices and different attitudes toward contrast.

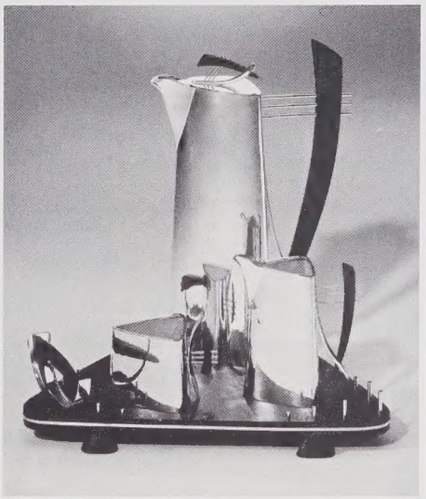
*Lynn Brunelle is a metalsmith, writer, and editor living in New York.*

LEFT TO RIGHT

*Rogers Communications Inc.*
*Media Award for Coverage of the Arts*
sterling silver, ebony
4 x 7¼ x 18"
Photograph by Ron Katz

*Coffee Service*
sterling silver, 14k, ebony





## Don Stuart: The Challenge of Metals

The Craft Gallery
Ontario Crafts Council
Toronto, Ontario
January 12 – February 27, 1994

The Chatham Cultural Centre
Chatham, Ontario
July 1994

by Lois Etherington Betteridge, R.C.A.

Twenty years of Don Stuart's work was displayed in this exhibition at the Ontario Craft Council's Gallery in Toronto earlier this year and beautifully documented in a handsome catalogue. The wide span of the exhibition – comprising 13 works from the seventies, 47 from the eighties, and 10 from the nineties – made it possible to trace the influence of Stuart's origins as a fibres worker and, also, how he has been affected by Scandinavian and Bauhaus design.

The artist's jewellery, which predominated in the exhibition, especially shows the influence of Stuart's fibres based background. Equally he is a master of inlay and catholic in his choice of materials; everything from copper ore to petrified wood to tiger-eye. Each material is carefully choosen for its colour effects, and then used meticulously to make clean, direct statements in his rings, pendants, and brooches. While each piece of jewellery is individual, through the seventies and eighties they are all clearly related in overall design and style; appearing graphic and two-dimensional despite their volume. Two brooches from 1986 illustrate the point, particularly in the manner in which the pin backs are used. In both, the pins are very much a part of the design, whether showing completely, or simply visible on either side. These two brooches also exhibit varying degrees of asymmetry but this seems to be a temporary design excursion as by 1990, the very symmetrical brooch had returned.

It is in Don's secular hollow ware that we see more variation and development over the twenty years. A sterling tankard made in 1980 is particularly striking. Its inlay is complex and includes opal, agate, brown coral, rosewood, silver and copper ores, narwhal ivory, and ebony.

However, only part of the lid is inlaid, and the resulting contrast with sterling makes the tankard very direct and clean. Don's cutlery from that time is also interesting. Knife blades are avant-garde in shape, and handles are subtly inlaid with gold and lapis lazuli, again showing the influence of fibre design.

The piece that probably drew the most attention in the show was the rose bowl that Don made in 1987 as the *Glen Gould Award.* Quite large (28 cm diameter), it has an inlaid silver medallion (about 9 cm square) in the centre of elements of silver wires laid over the top of the bowl. The little nuggets of gold which line the bottom of the bowl are very interesting and reward careful inspection. Another presentation piece is the *Rogers Communication Award*, made in 1991. Simple in concept, it is extremely expressive.

Certainly the most "far-out" works, and perhaps the signal of exciting things to come, are three wine cups made in 1991 - 92. They also include a wide variety of materials: silver, gilt, walnut, copper and silver ores, sodalite, agate, lapis lazuli, opal, ebony, patinated brass and copper, and Chinese turquoise beads. And, while some of these materials are used as inlays, others are successfully integrated into the design as lumps or cut pieces. Furthermore, two of the cups are totally asymmetrical, a great departure for the artist.

A recent (1992) coffee service is a fine example of Stuart's silversmithing. The coffee pot, creamer, and sugar bowl leave no doubt as to their function and have interesting details in their handles which are an effective combination of silver, gold, and ebony. The three-sided tray reflects the triangularity of the vessels, and successfully brings the set together.

Stuart's metal and fabric skills have been brought together in a large (8 metre) ecclesiastical hanging *Gloria in Excecis*, which he completed in 1989. It is made of brass, copper, aluminum, birch, mahogany, and fabrique appliqué. In Don's words "it was an exciting challenge interpreting the needs and wishes of the committee. This piece does not have obvious or expected symbolism. Although very public in position and scale, it is to me very private in thought and emotion."

Don Stuart has clearly drawn well upon thoughts and emotion in honing his fine sense of design. With this, and his fine craftsmanship, he has accomplished a large amount of integrated work over the past two decades and this well-mounted exhibition was a fitting tribute to his achievements.

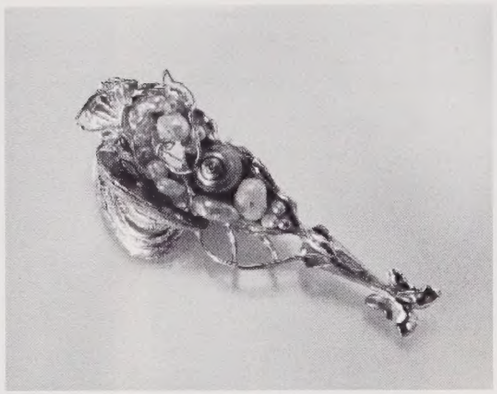
*Lois Etherington Betteridge is a metalsmith who lives in Toronto.*

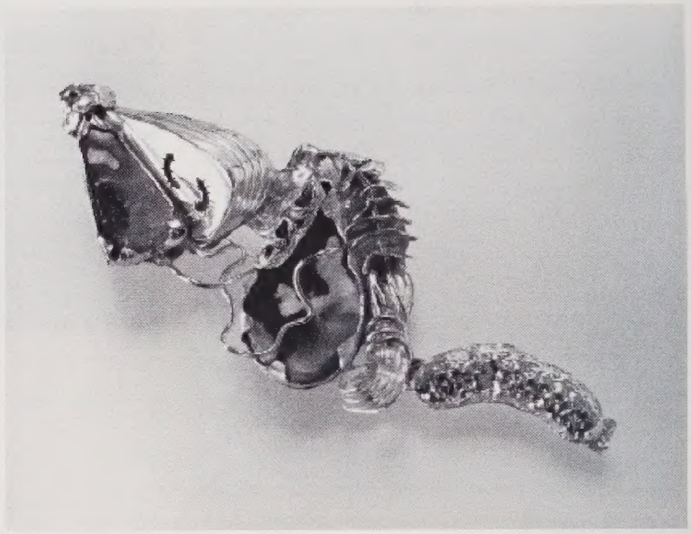
LEFT TO RIGHT

9363, 1993 (pin)
18k, Boulder opals
approx 3" l.

9364, 1993 (pin)
18k, pearls
approx. 3" l.

Photographs: Allen Bryan





## Margaret Barnaby

Susan Cummins Gallery
Mill Valley, California
October 4 – 30, 1993

By Matthew Kangas

So much has been written about Margaret Barnaby's debt to marine life that one wants to encounter her work on another level just for the sake of creating a critical dichotomy. Her Susan Cummins show was ornate and beautiful but not a major breakthrough. She is deepening her vision in a number of ways but is still committed to using nature and scientific illustration as sources for her forms and material treatment.

Roberta Floden described her 1988 body of work as "an aquatic extravaganza" and that still holds but, for our purposes, it is worth looking even more closely to determine whether the marine analogy goes beyond inspired description.

After all, natural world sources in and of themselves do not legitimize or validate a work of art nor give it any innovative cachet. Art Nouveau jewelry drew heavily from nature including sea forms as did some Baroque and Rococo court jewelry. Barnaby seems to be going toward even more eccentric silhouettes, stretching the limits of wearability and straining the net of historical influence.

She has been studying anatomical drawings of insects, their musculature, digestive, and respiratory systems and then translating them into metal and stone. This accounts for the bizarre configuration of *Pin 9363,* 1993, an elongated construction with tiny centipede or sea cucumber perforations in 18-carat gold and bellows or lung-like forms around two boulder opals. Equally extended, *Pin 9364* ,1993, suggests a golden clam or oyster shell filled with vacationing pearls above a propeller-like foot. This would look great on a woman with a Ph.D. in marine biology. Know any?

*Pin 9662* , 1993, completes the most irregularly profiled series. The straw topaz and blue boulder opal nestle among fluttering or fanlike plant forms of gold. Lynda Benglis definitely comes to mind. She also has used gold as a color, natural plant forms, and highly baroque compositions in her larger bronze, plaster and glass sculptures.

More compact and less elongated, *Earrings 9389,* 1993, are superficially similar to one another (bumpy golden shell, blue-green boulder opals) yet each clip is different and unmatchable, just as if both had been "born" into the same underwater species yet developed with unique DNA material. The care Barnaby takes to make each piece of jewelry completely unique in appearance is laudable and raises her high above handmade production jewelry.

Her summers in Maine must have a lot to do with the beachcombing residue-look in her art but Barnaby also confesses to a fondness for 18th-century French silverware with its elaborate chasing and repoussé work.

With their centered stones, the golden cuff bracelets seem less compositionally adventurous but, even here, the unusual juxtaposition of stones like morganite and garnet *Cuff 7333,* azurite and tanzanite *Cuff 9336,* and black tourmaline and smithsonite *Cuff 9394,* create chromatic tensions which keep the piece from becoming too familiar and, hence, boring.

As long as they remain on an abstracted, less literal plane of representation, the brooches and pines retain a fascination that more immediately recognizable imagery would quickly forestall. Barnaby shares this with sculptor Nancy Graves, daughter of a natural scientist, whose works are always more successful when they stray farthest away from their scientific-illustration sources. Barnaby's scale is so intimate, and different from Graves's large polychrome bronzes, but both artists confront organic life forms with rich artistic imaginations.

Standing in high relief to Modernist jewelry, Margaret Barnaby's art invokes historical precedents of eccentric ornamentation yet, created in the late 20th century, they have a social dimension of meaning, too: reminding us of the fragility of marine ecosystems and the need to protect our oceans and shorelines. In this sense, she is honoring and commemorating a rich, usually unseen world. Who would have thought Margaret Barnaby had become a Postmodernist?

*Matthew Kangas is an art critic and curator from Seattle, who is a frequent contributor to* Metalsmith.

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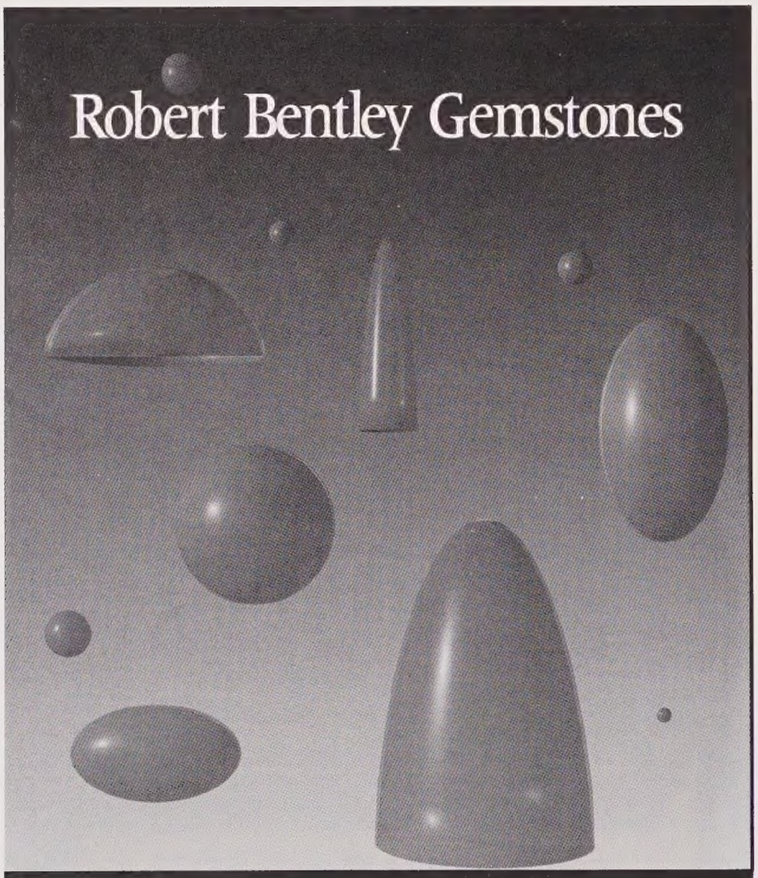

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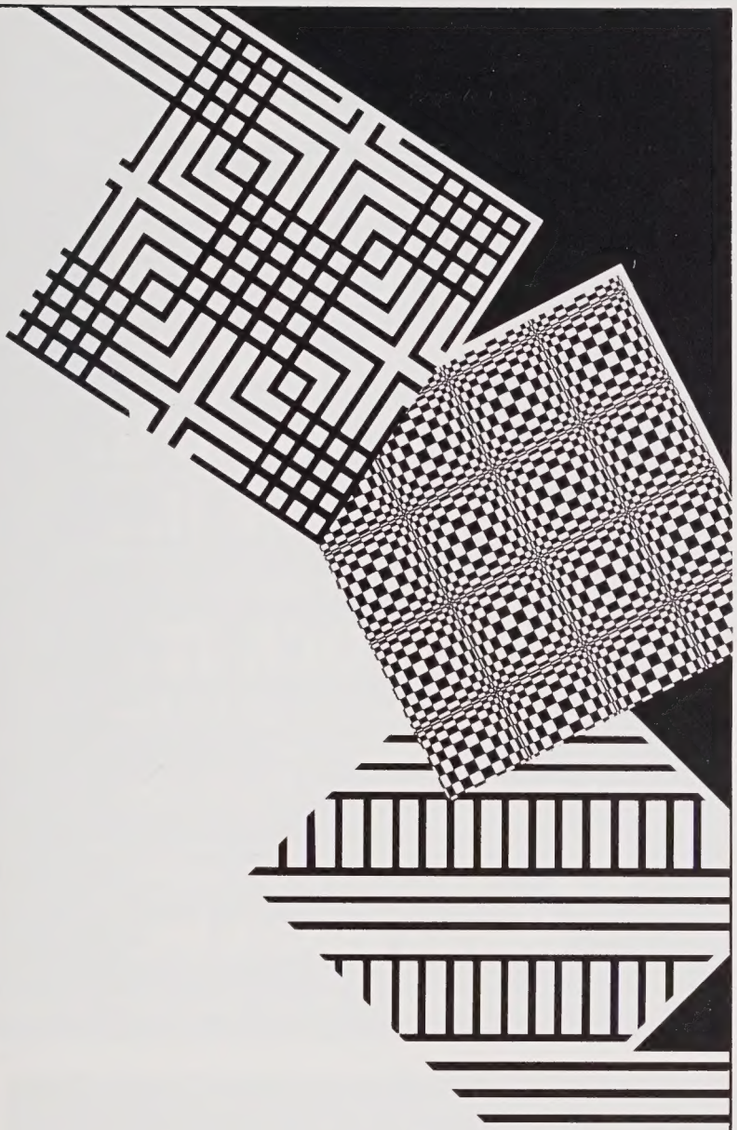

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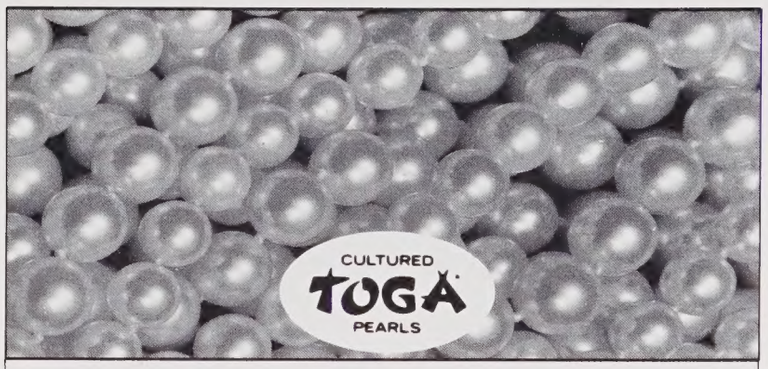


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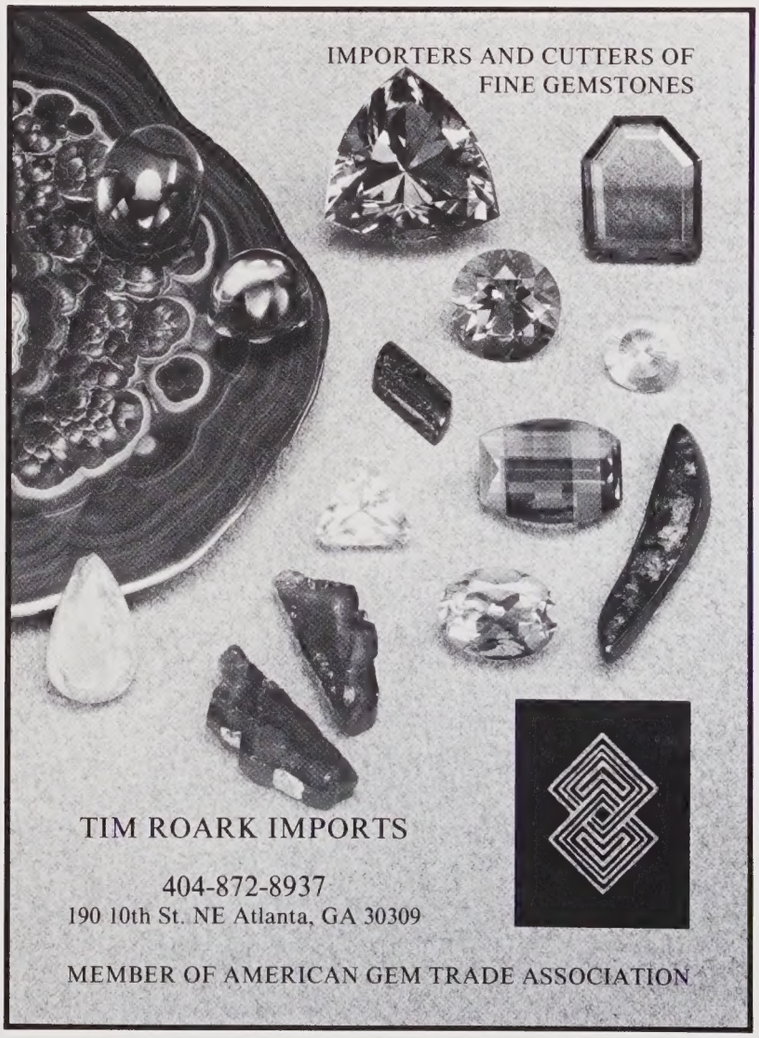

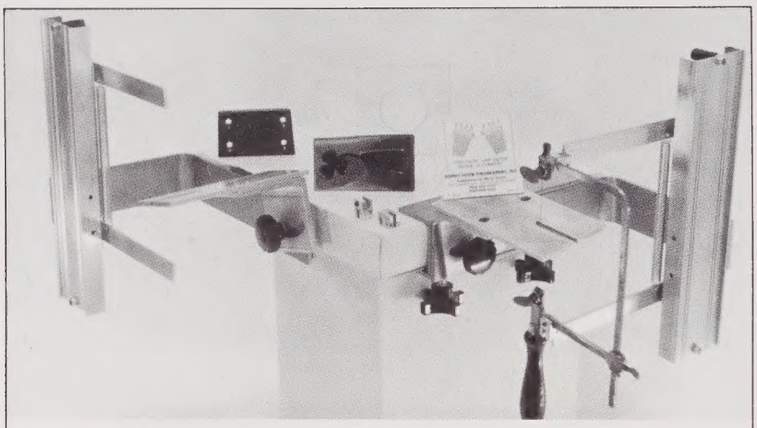

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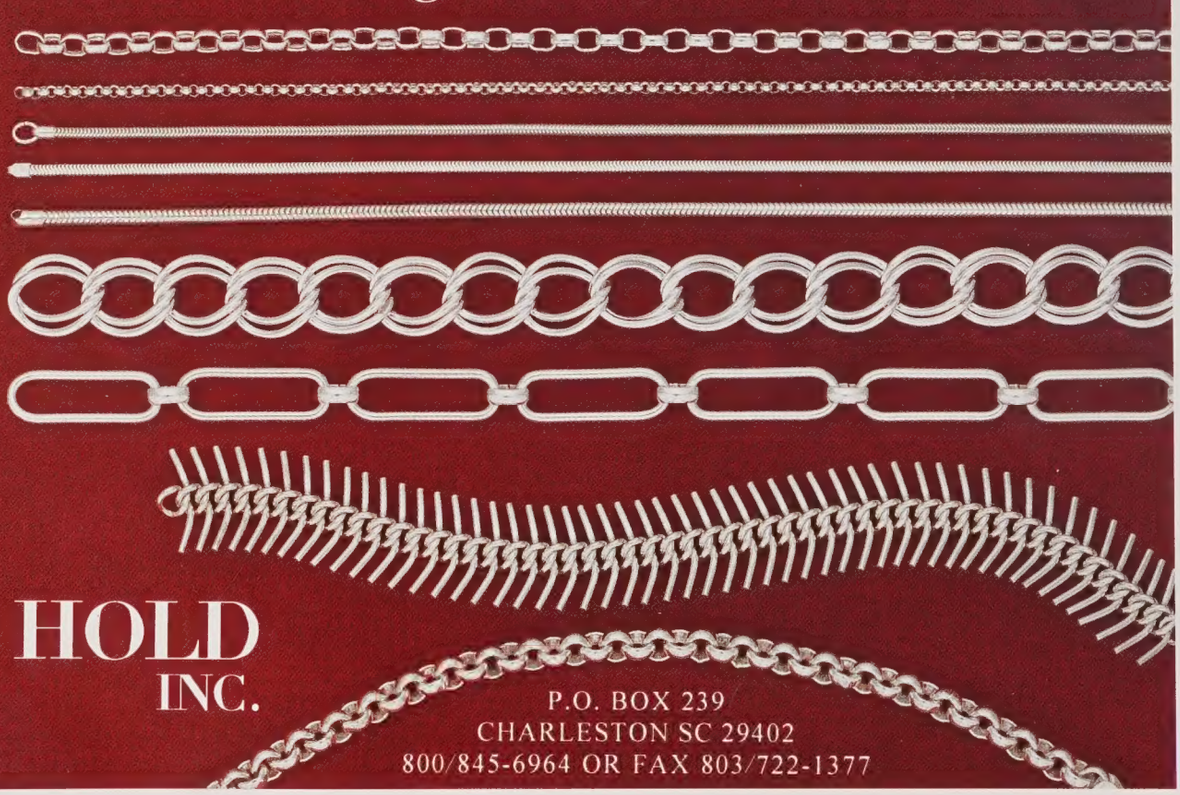

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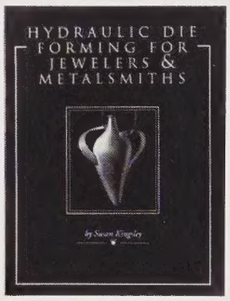


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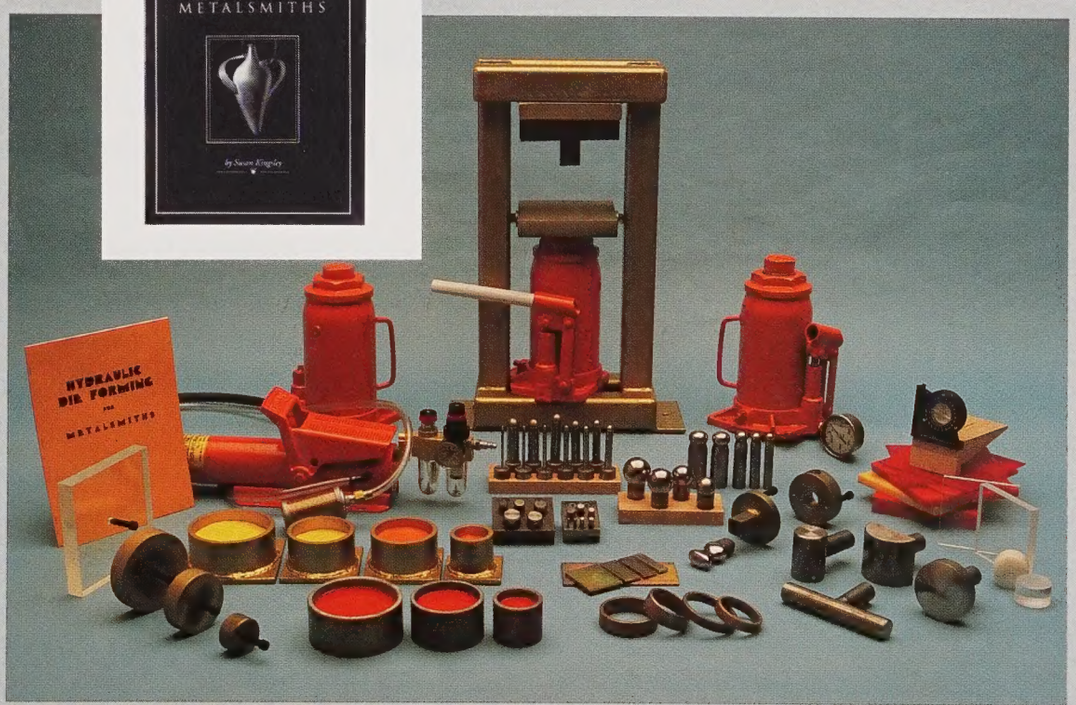


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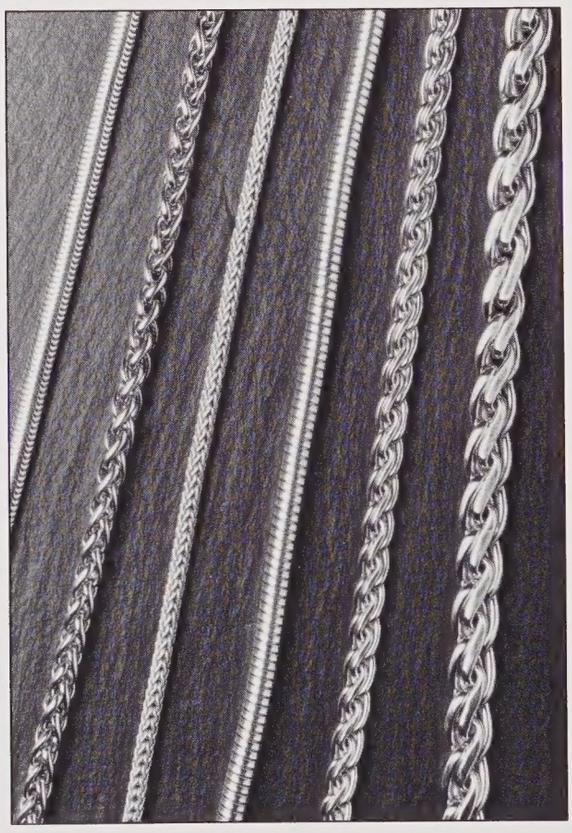

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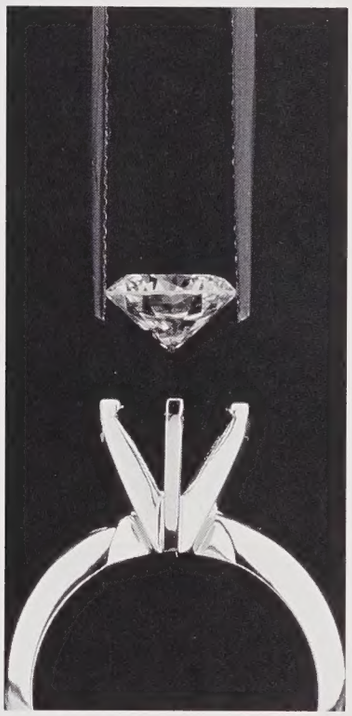

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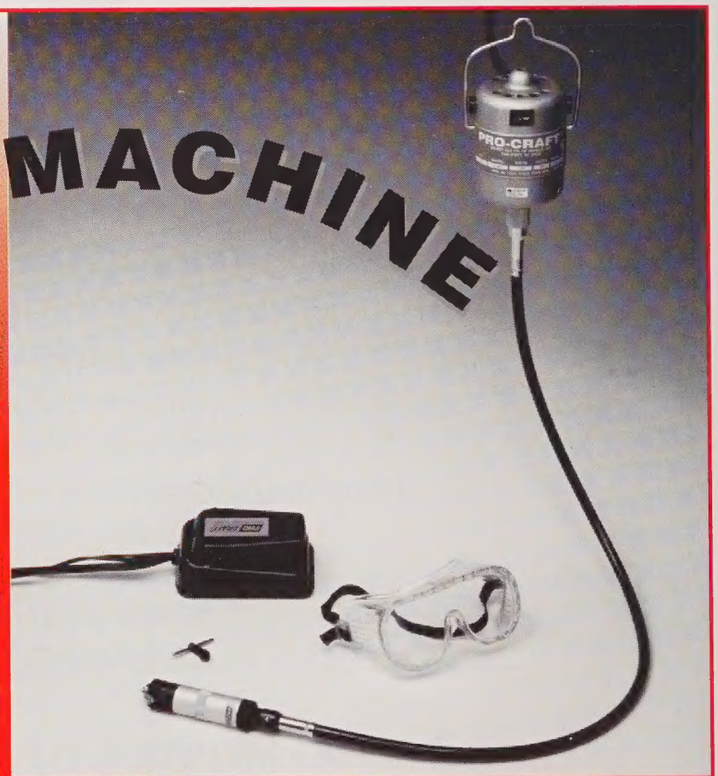


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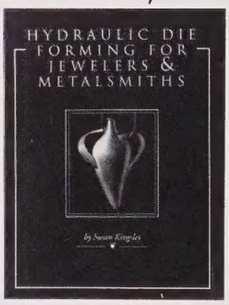


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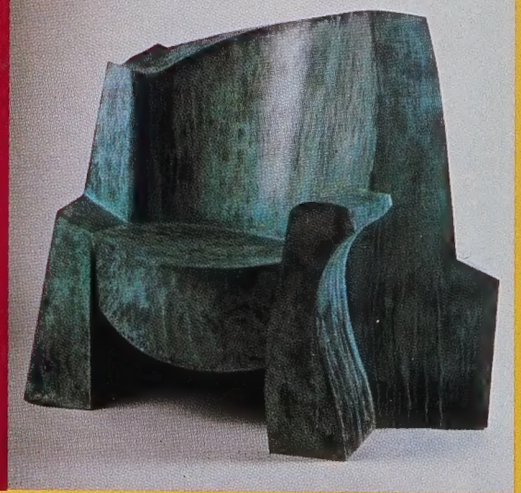

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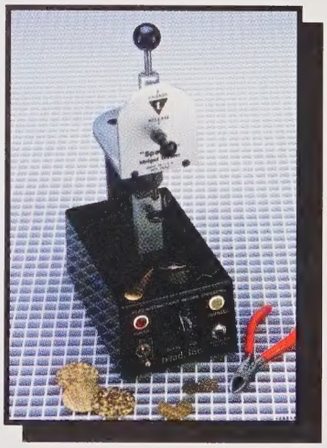

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# Metalsmith INDEX OF ADVERTISERS


| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| A & C Distributors | 58 | Larry Paul Casting | 57 |
| A. C. E. | 62 | Maurice Goldman | 51 |
| Anchor Tool & Supply Co. | 64 | Maxine's Art & Soul | 8 |
| Appalachian Crafts Center | 11 | Metalliferous | 53 |
| Art Tech Casting | 54 | Miami Jewelry Institute | 13 |
| Atypic | 3 | Michael Good | 1 |
| Bonny Doon Engineering | 52 | Mobilia | 7 |
| Buyers Market | 63 | Myron Toback, Inc. | 52 |
| C. Bauer | 8 | Newall Manufacturing | 54 |
| Cargo Hold, The | 52 | Oregon School of Arts & Crafts | 11 |
| CERF | 63 | Penland | 11 |
| Concepts | 1 | Precious Metals West | 64 |
| Craft Alliance Gallery | 9 | Reactive Metals | 49 |
| Cranbrook Academy | 8 | Red Sky Plating | 64 |
| Creative Metalsmiths | 3 | Revere Academy | 13 |
| David Fell Co | 51,59 | Richard Lindsay | 9 |
| D. Friedman | 54 | Rio Grande | BC |
| De Novo | 7 | Robert Bentley Gems | 50 |
| D T J | 58 | Sculpt Nouveau | 63 |
| E. B. Fitler | 50 | Sculpture to Wear | 3 |
| Facere | 3 | Sierra Casting | 53 |
| Frei & Borel | 53,IBC | Smithsonian Craft Show | 61 |
| Gem 2000 | 50 | SOFA | 60 |
| Grobet File Co. | 56 | Southwest Crafts Center | 13 |
| Guild, The | 61 | Stuller Settings | 55 |
| Hauser & Miller | 50 | Susan Cummins Gallery | 2 |
| J. A. Henkel | 49 | Thomas Mann Designs | 7 |
| J. Cotter Gallery | 2 | Tim Roark Imports | 51 |
| J. S. Ritter Jewelry Supply | 49 | Triad | 59 |
| Jett Gallery | 2 | Winged Camel Metalworks | 9 |
| Jewelry Arts Institute | 13 | Worcester Crafts | 11 |
| | | Young Manufacturing | 56 |

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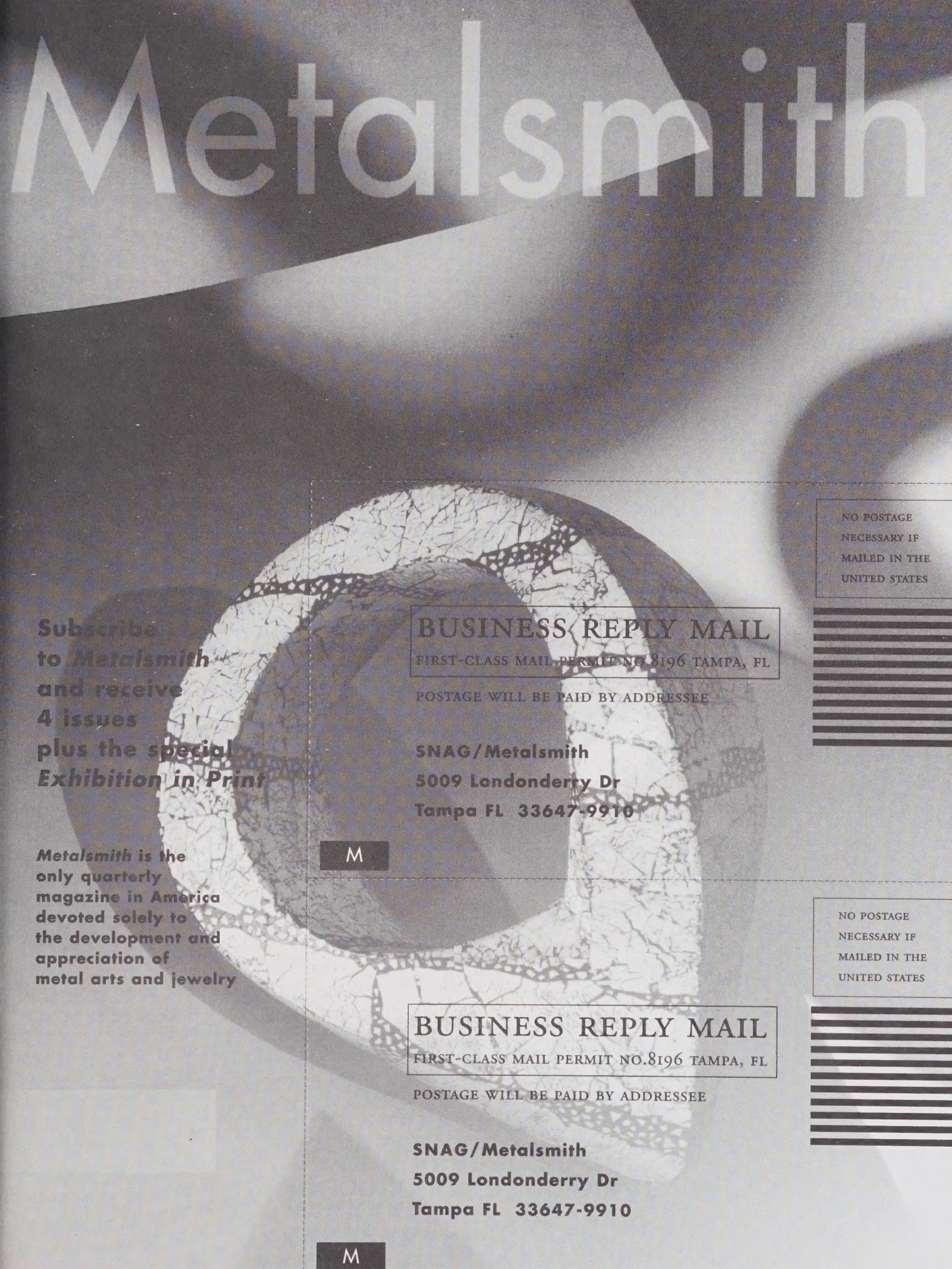

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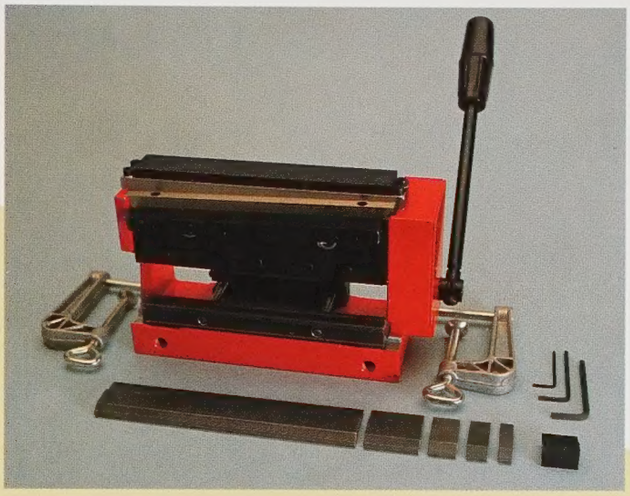

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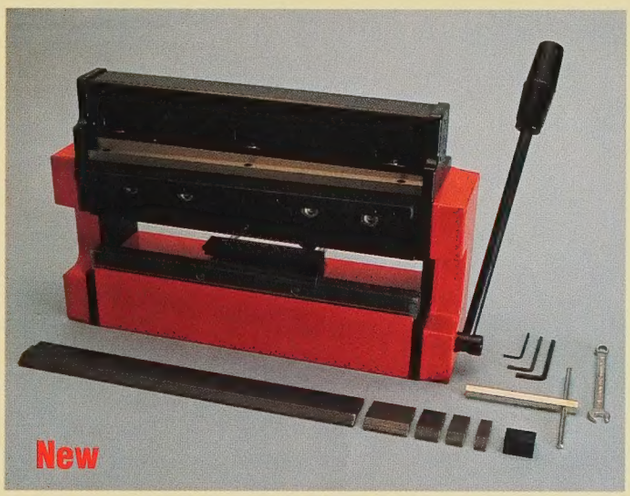


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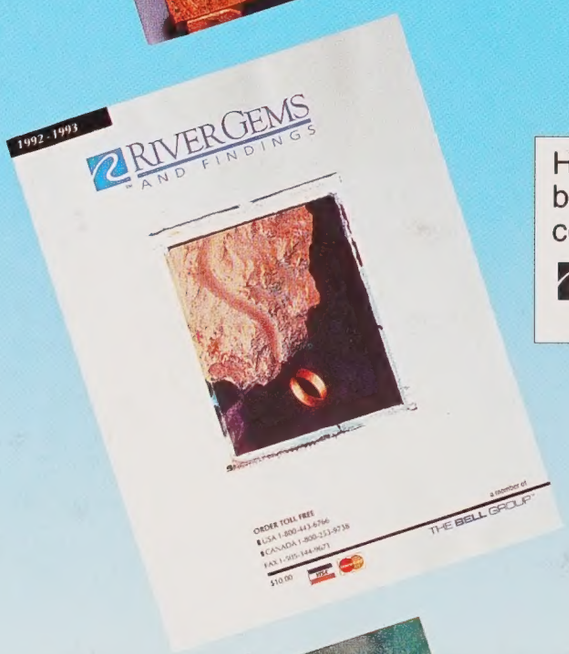


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